Salinity

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Salinity

by Batman_in_Lingerie, Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Summary

It seemed as though a truce had been struck; not a very strong one and definitely not one born of anything more than the need for survival on one part and the desire to be rid of the half-dead fish thing on the other.

Clark found something on the beach. That thing turned out to not be as dead as he first thought.

Notes

IT'S HERE!!!

Welcome one and welcome all! This is an expansions of the Mermaid!AU from my other story 'Infinite'. This story takes place before the events of Infinite, but it can be read as a stand alone.

Chapter 1

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

March 3rd 2016

There is something on the beach.

Clark looked up from his journal, his eyes briefly catching the mass that was visible far along the shore line. In another world it could have been something simple; some seaweed carried in on the tide, perhaps a part of some storm worn boat, it could have been an old tangled mass of fishing net.

It was none of those things.

Clark didn't need to get up to know that.

He could see it well enough from here.

It was one of *those* things.

He debated pretending he hadn't seen it; to just go on about his day as if it were any other, but that idea didn't come to fruition. After all, he knew he had to deal with it. Dead bodies were generally not something that would sort themselves out. With enough time, perhaps something would come along and pick at the corpse until it became remains, and then again until even those became nothing, but as it was already enough of an eyesore, Clark didn't want to wait for it to get any worse.

Even if it would save him the trouble of disposal.

He got up from his desk, stretching his arms above his head, just barely missing the light bulb that dangled down from above.

His house wasn't much. In fact, some may even hesitate to call it a house, mostly due to its more than passing resemblance to a shack.

So to amend.

His shack wasn’t much. It was small, made of wooden walls and creaky floor boards. That small room however contained all that he required to exist. A bed, a chair, a desk, a small gas oven. He had books to read, and a small radio should he wish to listen to the outside world. There was a tub under the bed and an outhouse out back and that was all he truly needed.

Out here on the island, he was as off the grid as possible. Nothing like city life, or hell, even small town life. His power came from a small petrol powered generator, and water from a crude evaporator he made when he first got here. Occasionally, he would trade with the other nearby islands, but even those encounters were quick and fleeting, with little more than a hello passing between either sets of lips.

No, out here, he was isolated from the world.

Which is how Clark found himself writing the sentence now stamped in ink inside his journal, as well as the hundreds before it.

Diana had given him the journal when he first moved to the island, among other items which Clark either promptly traded or threw out into the ocean current to bother someone else with their presence.

Yet despite condemning the other gifts to their fate, the journal did not join them. Instead he held onto it, and in that moment told himself that he would use it as little more than a notebook, ignoring the word emblazoned on the front that begged to differ.

But that intent began to change after the first five months alone. Slowly but surely, the journal became itself.

It became an outlet. An unbiased ear that listened to whatever thoughts ran through his head, no matter how trivial. The best part, he discovered, was the freedom of it, he didn't have to justify himself to the pages, didn't have to lie, or coddle. He could write down anything and everything he wanted to without fear of what anyone else would think about it.

It was almost as if it were a person, though Clark never allowed himself to go further down that trail of thought. ~~*A name?*~~ He'd shake his head. He knew that *that* would be going too far. Too far to be able to return from without lasting effects. ~~*What are you afraid of? The insanity or loneliness?*~~

Are you talking back to me now?

~~*Maybe I am, name me and I'll let you know.*~~

Eventually they would quiet down. His own thoughts, he'd stress. *Not* the journal. The journal couldn't speak. It was not alive. It was not a person.

His dependency on the book would be a thing of concern to most normal people, but Clark had forgone normalcy a long ago. Around the same time he moved out here. He knew there were things he needed to do, needed to understand, in order to function. A part of himself knew he *needed* something to talk to, and he just so happened to find that something, even if it were inanimate.

If anything, the inanimacy was a good thing, given what the other options were.

He looked at the lump on the beach.

They would come to him sometimes. The mermaids. They'd call him. Sing to him. Some would even come out of the water and sit on his dock, waving their tails languidly as they lay, smiling smiles so beautiful Clark could feel some long dead emotion stirring within himself as he'd wait for them to leave.

Clark found them revolting.

He always had, ever since he was a child growing up in Smallville. They didn't deal with mers often, but when they did they looked just like the ones Clark saw now, beautiful faces with beautiful bodies, all the better to trick you with.

He didn't want to know how many people had fallen for the facade. Didn't want to know just how many were now nothing more than splinters of bone drifting along the bottom of the ocean.

It was part of the reason Clark felt not so much as an ounce of sympathy as he looked out the window and caught sight of the thing on the beach once more.

He did however concede that he had to deal with it quickly, lest infer the wrath of the seagulls that would soon be swarming around it. He slipped on his sandals and made his way along the shore toward it.

After a few minutes of walking he came across the lump in its entirety.

It's body was marred with cuts and bites that still seeped blood. With each wave that washed the shore line, the sand beneath it would grow darker with the leaking fluids. If it weren't for the faintest hint of a heart beat, Clark would have assumed the thing was already dead, and yet there it was; breathing and still very much alive.

For how much longer, Clark couldn't say. He really didn't have much, if any, experience with *near* dead mermaids, and didn't know how long it could take for them to pass. He contemplated throwing it back into the water and letting it die at sea, at least then it would hopefully float off and bother someone else and Clark wouldn't have to be the one to deal with it anymore.

Knowing his luck, however.

He approached the thing, and used his foot to roll it onto his back.

The first thing he noticed was its face.

It had a nice face.

Of course it had a nice face.

The things were never ugly. It was part of their allure. They all looked as though they'd be perfect muses for some long dead renaissance artist, immortalized in paints and marble. Yet they weren't, instead they were found in encyclopedias, with the moniker 'extremely deadly' at the head of the page.

Aside from its face, it didn't have much in common with other mermaids Clark had seen. For one thing it was riddled with old scars and aside from the pale milky skin across its chest and face, the rest of his body was a deep blue, almost black in colour.

Yet despite, or perhaps because of the chunks of flesh missing from its body and the cavalcade of cuts, Clark thought it was far more beautiful than any other mermaid he'd ever seen.

He couldn't help the loathing he felt for it as a result.

He nearly threw it back in for that alone.

And yet, that didn't happen

Despite the hatred, he knew what he was going to do, what he had to do. He knew it the minute he saw it on the beach. He reached down and eased the body into his arms.

The thing was heavy, made of muscle and not much else. Most mermaids he'd seen would sit and sing with their pretty bright scales and soft slender bodies, all the better to lull you into a false sense of security with.

Whereas the one Clark currently held looked like it *ate* those types of mermaids.

How it would lure anyone into the water looking like it did was beyond Clark. At least with other mermaids you could make the argument that they didn't appear to be vicious killers. This one on the other hand, had Clark wondering what it had to be up against to be the one that lost.

It could have been a shark, he supposed. Maybe a killer whale. Despite being the dominant ocean species, mermaids couldn't always rely on a pretty face to win a fight, especially when the opponent was a ten tonne whale. It was why they roamed around in pods, there was safety in numbers, making it less likely for them to be picked off by an opportunistic shark or a particularly vengeful fisherman.

Clark eyed the water wearily as he walked back towards his shack. Did this one have a pod? If it did, he assumed they would still be out there, perhaps even keeping an eye on their companion should it make a miraculous recovery.

As he looked, he noticed there was not so much as a ripple along the water to indicate he was being watched.

He kicked open the door to his shack. With his arms full, he used his foot once more to pull the tub out from under the bed and set the thing inside of it, trying his best to keep the blood and gore away from his bed sheets. It was easier said than done as his shack was tiny with just one person inside, and with a mermaid now occupying half the floor space, Clark had to edge his way over to where his cell phone was kept lest step on the thing.

He couldn't actually remember the last time he'd used his phone. Diana flew to him when she wanted to talk, knowing full well that Clark wouldn't answer even if she did do him the courtesy of calling ahead first. He opened the drawer in his desk and reached for the phone and the small contact book beside it.

He flicked through the book idly. There was Diana's name neatly penciled in near the front. There were names with a single line through them. There were names so thoroughly crossed out Clark couldn't make out what name used to be there, and there were names with no numbers at all; only addresses to homes that didn't exist anymore.

Eventually he got to the contact he was looking for.

It was for a marine biologist Clark had bumped into whilst on one of his trips inland to trade. He'd told Clark he researched mermaids, and had given his number in case one happened to wash up on his

beach. Whilst Clark didn't think much of it at the time, it now seemed like the perfect solution to his problem. He'd call, and then what happened next to the thing was none of his concern. If it died, it wasn't his problem. If it lived, it still wasn't his problem. He would be absolved of all guilt, and with that in mind he started to dial the number.

That was when the screaming started.

Clark wanted to say he didn't shriek in surprise, and yet when the screaming started it was definitely only him that could have joined in.

After recovering from the initial shock, Clark shoved the phone and book into the drawer and slammed it shut.

He slowly turned to face the thing. Despite the fight it showed, Clark could see it was running on fumes. Its attempts to flee looked less like a display of power and more of abject futility.

The thing couldn't even lift itself up out of the tub, let alone cause any damage to anything other than its own body.

Clark pressed his lips together as he watched it continue in vain to try and escape. After a while it got hard to watch, with its own blood causing it to lose its grip on the tub and slip back against it with a thud.

After a few minutes it quieted down. It didn't fall unconscious, or die, like a small part of Clark expected it to. It just sat there, its eyes glazed over, its body shaking as it must have realised just how close to death it was.

Clark left the room shortly after. He had to get away from the sight of it. When it was half dead and unconscious it was easy to see it as a thing, as a lump, as a *it* .

But awake?

He found his old bathtub behind the shack. It was a lot smaller than his new one, but he still found it handy for some things, like collecting rainwater or washing his clothes. He made his way to the shore and filled it with as much water as it could hold and walked back to his shack.

It still wasn't moving when he walked in, but its eyes did follow Clark as he stepped inside, and widened by a fraction when Clark started to pour the water slowly from one tub to the other.

With two more trips to the shore, the water in the tub just barely came to the things chest. It didn't seem to shake as much in the water at least, and Clark wondered if he should try to put his tail in it as well, but decided against it. Especially with how much the wounds were still leaking.

It was as he looked at the seeping wound that he steeled himself and brought out his first aid kit. Whilst he didn't need it for himself, he did have the occasional fisherman who would dock on his shores in need of help with some small injury or another.

Fishing was dangerous in these parts, and due to that inherent danger, it also came with the benefit of being one of the more lucrative jobs for islanders. With the high populations of some islands and the limited amount of land for growing crops, most if not all people relied on the ocean in some form or another for their food. Reliance drives up price, danger drives it up even further.

Sometimes that danger would mean a scrape and bruise.

Sometimes it would mean a capsized boat.

Most of the time however, it meant death.

He looked down at the kit and then towards the occupant of the tub. He'd never tried to suture a mermaid before, but apparently this was becoming a day of firsts for Clark.

He expected it to fight, but knew in the back of his mind it wouldn't. For one thing it had used what little energy it had accrued from lying unconscious on the beach when it tried to get out of the tub.

Now, it allowed Clark to handle its tail with only a low growl coming from its throat to indicate that it wasn’t completely happy with the arrangement.

It wasn’t his cleanest work, mostly due to the slippery surface and wiggly patient. He also couldn’t lie about the fact he didn’t care about the neatness of the outcome, only that he wanted to stop touching the thing as soon as possible.

The sentiment was apparently shared.

As Clark put his needle down and got up from his seat, the thing pulled its tail into the water completely, its hands running along the flesh, making sure it was all still there.

Clark rolled his eyes, but otherwise didn’t comment. It wasn't as if it could understand him even if he did. Mermaids didn’t vocalise like humans, they shared more in common with dolphins and whales in that regard. Whilst some had been heard speaking, it was assumed they were only able to mimic the sounds they heard, rather than to properly use whatever language they picked up.

He wondered if there was even a point in trying to explain any of what he was doing to the thing.

He decided there wasn’t and walked out of the shack, towards his boat. He hopped on board and grabbed one of his fishing polls before going off to the far end of the dock.

He spent a few hours fishing. At least by looking out into the water, he could ignore the things presence inside his home and as the sun began to go down he even had a few fish to show for his efforts.

Clark knew he'd have to go and check on it eventually. So with a sigh, he got up from the dock and made his way inside. When he did, he saw the thing sleeping in the water, its neck and mouth beneath the surface. It was somewhat comical watching it try to squeeze itself into the tub that had a hard time holding Clark himself in it, but somehow the thing managed it, with only a small part of the end of its fin falling over the edge of the tub.

As he watched, he wondered if it was hungry.

He threw a fish into the tub.

The thing didn't thrash awake like he had somewhat expected it to, but there was panic in its eyes when they flew open. It quickly looked down to the fish now resting on its stomach, its stare turning curious.

"It's food." Clark said. His voice was hoarse, he cleared his throat. "You need to eat, don't you?"

Its ears pricked at the sound, but it didn't make any attempt to eat the fish, its eyes closing once again. Clark heaved a sigh, reaching into the water and taking the fish out, only to hit the thing with it again. "Eat. The. Fish."

This time, the thing growled at Clark. Clark however did not back down, lifting the fish near its face and holding it there. "I will keep slapping you with this fish until you get the hint."

Eventually it did take the hint, and it was when Clark sat back and saw the thing try and move its arms that he realised that maybe it didn't even have enough energy *to* eat. Clark cursed to himself as he grabbed the fish back from it again and reached for his pocket knife.

He hacked off a little part of the tail and held it up to the thing's mouth. He was sent a look that read only of suspicion and Clark returned it.

After a moment of hesitation, its mouth opened, revealing its teeth, sharp and jagged, and Clark gingerly put the piece inside. It wasn't because he was worried it would hurt him, far from it. He simply didn't want to add a case of shattered teeth to the list that would keep the thing in his home for longer than necessary.

Luckily it didn't close its mouth until Clark's hand was well away. He reached for the knife to cut another piece.

He worked his way through the fish, slowly taking it apart and bringing it to its mouth. Clark debated giving it the little organs in its body, but didn't understand fish anatomy well enough to know what was good to eat and what was gristle and urinary tracts. He flung the carcass outside and went to prepare his own supper as the thing dozed in the tub.

It seemed as though a truce had been struck; not a very strong one and definitely not one born of anything more than the need for survival on one part and the desire to be rid of the half-dead fish thing on the other.

Because Clark for all his posturing did not want to be the indirect or direct cause of the death of anything, even a mermaid. Especially when it wasn't trying to actively kill him, at least not in that moment. No, it was a victim of circumstance and despite taking off the Superman mantal years ago, it still clung onto him like a parasite, sapping whatever malice he had at every turn.

It didn't exactly leave him with much sympathy for the thing, however.

He knew it must be in a lot of pain, and the tub it was cramped into must not have been helping matters, but as far as Clark was concerned, he was making a sacrifice in regards to his own comfort to tend to the thing, so it should be thankful to even have the tub.

After frying his fish, he sat at his desk and set down the plate. As he began to eat he looked down at his journal, rereading the short entry written across the page.

He closed the book.

Chapter 2

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 4th 2016

Well, it made it through the night.

I don't know if that's a good thing.

The morning had barely begun and Clark already felt done with the day.

Slumped against his desk, he stared out the window towards the horizon, his eyes blurring the line between the pink of the sky and the blue of the sea until he wasn't sure where one ended and the other began. The longer he stared the more he believed he must still be asleep, that what he was seeing was all in his mind and at any moment he'd wake; but no, he was definitely awake, the painful ache in his eyes was enough of a reminder of that.

Eventually he managed to pull himself from his reverie and turned in his chair, eyeing the body in the tub beside him.

He must admit, he didn't think the thing would get through the night.

But it did.

It had slept soundly. Barely made any noise.

That made it worse.

When it went too quiet, too still, Clark could feel his heart hammering at the thought of the thing dying right then and there beside him. That scenario ran on repeat in his mind to the point it became nauseating only to be followed by the thought of what he would do should that nightmare actually happen. Would he get up from bed and throw the body out in the water? Would he finally call that marine biologist? Would he remain in bed and pretend he hadn't heard it die? ~~Would the guilt finally kill you?~~

When he had first found it, the things death seemed like a certainty. Had it died yesterday, Clark would have chalked it up to survival of the fittest and moved on with his life. Guilt would have never entered the conversation for it was beyond his control. Now that it had made it through the day however, its death was no longer a certainty. It was only a possibility, one that despite everything, Clark didn't want to see happen.

It was when these thoughts grew too loud to bare that he would sit up in bed and eye the thing intently, waiting for it to move, to give him any indication it was still alive aside from that faint heartbeat.

Eventually it would do just that, its hand would twitch, its eyelids would flicker and occasionally it would make a noise. After seeing these displays that showed that, yes, it was indeed still alive, and yes, you won't wake up next to a corpse ~~again~~, Clark would lay back down in his bed only for the cycle to repeat about an hour later.

He didn't know how much actual sleep he got that night. He was fairly certain at points he was sleeping with his eyes open, with the fog of a dream beginning to creep into his vision only to dissipate when he heard the thing grow too quiet once more. He was thankful when morning broke. Not only did it end the torturous cycle he found himself trapped in, but it reassured him, as though the idea of it managing to get through one night made it impossible for it to die now and Clark could stop worrying about it so much.

He kicked the blanket off of himself and sat up, rubbing his eyes to try and get rid of the sting in them. With the thing now a fixture in his home and knowing he wasn't going to get any more sleep anyway, he rose just as the sun did, and after writing a quick entry in his journal, made his way outside, walking along the beach as the sun made its way higher and higher.

The warmth of the sun brushed against him and his fatigue slowly lifted. It was still there, but it had significantly lessened, and if he stayed out in it a while longer he knew it would go completely. The

upside of being solar powered, Clark mused.

It was as he walked further down the beach that he came across the spot where he'd found the thing the day before.

There was no sign that it had even been there. The sand was washed clean.

That was often the case with the island. No matter what happened, what storm it had to endure or how high the waves were that rolled in, it always returned to how Clark first remembered finding it. As though nothing had changed in that time. As though nothing *could* change it.

He looked out at the water.

It's been over three years since he'd moved out here. Three years since he first found this place and built his shack. Three years since Metropolis.

It didn't feel like it though.

Time had a way of distorting itself out here, especially when you were on your own.

Days would bleed into weeks, into months, until one day you'd find yourself looking out across the water realising it had been three years since your life was irrevocably changed.

He didn't like to dwell on it.

Sadly. he had a lot of time to dwell on it.

He squashed those thoughts down for now and moved his mind onto other things. Like his plan for the day.

Aside from a few scant todo lists, he never gave himself a strict schedule. He found the less he planned, the less disappointed in himself he'd be when he inevitably didn't do it. He supposed he could tinker with his boat some more. The engine was starting to sputter again, and whilst he did have some money saved up for a new one he didn't want to waste it whilst the thing still had some life in it.

He could also do some more fishing. Last time he made his way over to Cottonwood, Lucy, the shopkeeper he'd taken to trading with mentioned how low supplies were getting since one of the fisherman lost his boat to the mers. Now the town were having to make do with what they could catch from land. Which wasn't much considering how the mers liked to cut and tamper with the lines.

He walked back towards his home, a vague idea of what was to be the rest of his day in mind.

Of course all that flew out the window when he stepped inside his shack.

The thing was out of the tub.

Well, half out of the tub.

The thing hadn't even stepped fully off of death's doorstep before it appeared to be trying to hurry back there as soon as possible.

Clark stood for a moment, regarding the thing though narrowed eyes. Most of its lower body was still in the water, but it's hips were what must have halted its escape. They were caught on the edge of the tub, leaving its upper body dangling over the side, its head hanging low in apparent defeat. Clark tried not to laugh at the image.

He approached it and watched as it tried to turn itself to him, succeeding only after exerting what looked like a monumental amount of energy. Its arms shook from the strain of holding itself up from the floor as it eyed him warily. Clark however only had eyes for the suturing he had done only yesterday, now torn and seeping with fresh blood. He heaved a sigh. "You're a moron, you know that right?"

At least it had the decency to look somewhat sheepish. Whether it was from being caught trying to flee or from the blood now collecting on the floor, Clark didn't know, and despite wanting to leave it

there to teach it a lesson in humility; Clark did eventually go forward, and lifted the thing back into the water.

It didn't protest from what Clark could gather. It made a few sounds in the back of its throat that sounded like they could have been, but it didn't try to push or scratch at him, so as far as Clark was concerned, the thing had accepted things as they currently stood.

Those ‘things’ being; “You are going to die if you keep acting like a dumb shit.” Clark said as he stared hard at the things face, trying to infuse the same energy from his voice into his expression.

The thing didn’t respond to either.

Clark sighed.

He got up from his seat and grabbed the first aid kit. He gestured for the things tail and after more than a little coaxing, he was able to sew it up. Again.

This time it didn’t try to pull its tail away as soon as Clark was finished, opting instead to flick it, causing the fins at the end of it to slap against Clark’s thigh. He tried to stop himself from frowning. He failed. “You’re welcome.” He deadpanned.

The thing tilted its head to the side at the words, eyeing Clark for what felt like an inordinately long time. The sole thought that lingered in Clark’s mind was how bright it’s eyes were, a shade of blue so light they practically shone. The longer he looked at them the more his mind grew fuzzy. He quickly looked away, his cheeks growing hot.

He then realised what he had done and scowled. “God fucking damn it.” He muttered, wiping his face. The thing had only been there a day and it was already messing with his mind.

At the words, Clark heard the thing let out a quiet chirp, similar to a cat's trill. He quickly sent his scowl upwards towards it. “You’re a goddamn nuisance.” He ground out.

There was no response. Not even a chirp this time, but those ears flickered again, trembling in the air before falling still. Clark watched them intently as he spoke. “Can you even understand me?”

The ears trembled again, but as soon as Clark stopped speaking, they fell still. Despite feeling as though this was pertinent information, Clark neither cared nor understood enough to do anything with it. Instead he sighed. “Alright, so you can’t understand me, but you know i'm not going to hurt you, right?”

At the raised inflection at the end, the things' eyes went wide. It moved its head in what Clark wanted to say was a nod, but again, knowing as little as he did about mermaids, he couldn’t say. Instead he simply continued. “So, if you know i'm not going to hurt you, you know you shouldn't try to escape again before you’re healed, right?”

Again, that same aborted nodding motion at the intonation. Clark stared at the thing a little while longer, before he got up and placed the first aid kit away.

Despite their presence on the planet molding humanity into its current state, not much was actually known about the mers that plagued the oceans. Whenever scientists attempted to learn and document them, whether in the wild or in captivity it always ended the same way. Death. Either for the poor saps who decided to take a boat out into mermaid infested waters or for the mermaid who would kill itself when caught rather than be kept in a tank and studied.

In death, some things can be learnt about mermaids at least. Simple things about their biology but nothing that could help Clark now. No, there was little known about their language comprehension, nor if they could truly speak like a human beyond mimicking what they had heard. In the water, they have been heard communicating much like whales do, through songs and clicks, but out of the water was another matter entirely.

Then there was their hierarchy, something that humans still don't have a concrete answer for despite how many cameras have been sent into the water to observe them. The most that could be said was that they live in communities, much like humans do, but migrate to different waters dependent on the season. It was part of the reason Clark suspected this one landed on his beach. The water was getting warmer and with that brought mermaids.

But that idea invited more questions than answers. For one, why weren’t there any others with it? If it were migrating, surely there would have been others. Surely they wouldn’t have left it to die if it could have been saved. He knew mers could be ruthless, but to do that to one of their own seemed especially cold blooded. Even now, when he’d cast his eyes out towards the water, he’d expect to see a huddle of mers in wait, but no, no matter how many times he looked to the water, it was as still as when he first found the thing half dead on his beach.

It could be alone, was the answer he would receive whenever he thought about the things pod. It wasn't as though it was a concrete hypothesis that all mermaids lived in groups. For one, there were various species of mers out there each with their own habits and lifestyles. It was likely Clark had simply found one of these different mers. A kind that was solitary.

Eventually Clark decided he'd had enough thoughts about mers to last a lifetime and resolved to spend his day being productive and to not dwell anymore on the temporary annoyance in his life. He got up and made his way to the door.

The thing screeched.

Clark winced, and even though he knew what made the sound he slowly turned to the thing all the same, his lips curled downward.

The thing gave another screech, that Clark quickly realised must have been its attempt to talk. Clark's eyes blew wide as he shook his head. "Stop, stop that-" when it didn't, he rushed towards it, putting his finger over it's lips. "You sound awful."

The thing's brows furrowed together and it reached for Clark's finger. It pulled it away, and stared at the digit. This time when its mouth opened, the sound it made was still awful but at least didn't make Clark want to pop his own ear drums to avoid hearing it. There was also still the problem that Clark didn't know *what* it was trying to tell him. "You need to understand, I don't know what you're trying to tell me." He said, despite knowing the sentiment was shared.

The things ears twitched and this time, instead of speaking, it pointed to the door, then motioned to itself, moving its body side to side before pointing to the door once more. Clark's eyes narrowed. "You want to go outside?"

There was a moment where the thing made a face, as though ready to agree but stopping itself. Clark realised it probably didn't know what question Clark was actually asking him so didn't know how to respond correctly. Rather than play the guessing game with it any longer, Clark decided to act instead. He brought his hands to the tub, and lifted it up. The thing yelped at the movement, but as Clark made his way out the door the thing gave what Clark could only assume were chirps of agreement as they continued towards the water.

Clark set the tub down on the sand, not far from the water, but the thing simply stayed seated. After reopening the wound on its tail, Clark could only assume it didn't want a repeat. So with only a touch of reluctance, Clark reached into the tub, and slid his hands under the things tail and arms, lifting it up

and walking it a few paces towards the water. He set it down and stepped back. “There.” He said, gesturing his hand to the water.

The thing looked to the water, then to Clark, then to the tub, then back to Clark, before it slowly inched its way further into the water until its whole lower body was submerged. It sat there for a moment, and Clark saw the muscles of his back tense up as he remained in place. For a moment Clark stood staring at the mer, his frown growing as he tried to figure out what exactly it was doing.

Then it dawned on him

“Oh.” Clark said, his eyes blowing wide. “Oh yeah, I forgot you must need to, uh-” Clark turned away, clearing his throat. “I'll let you do... that.”

He faced the shack for a minute, and only turned back around when he heard movement in the sand. The thing was making its way slowly back towards the tub, and as it moved, Clark realised it wasn’t going to be leaving any time soon. Its tail was out of commission and having to rely on its arms entirely must be tiring the thing as even the short distance between the tub and water had its whole body shaking.

It sat beside the tub, sending an expectant stare Clark’s way. Clark wanted to say he didn’t relish the idea of becoming the things servant, but he had little choice if he wanted it to actually heal and not tear its wounds open every time it needed to use the bathroom. Even with those eyes on him, he didn’t go for the mer straight away, approaching the tub instead. He lifted it up and emptied the blood tainted water into the ocean before dipping it under the waves and refilling it.

After setting the tub back inside, he made his way back out to retrieve the thing. It came into his arms easily, even bringing its hands to Clark’s shoulders to stabilize itself when it was lifted up.

Once back in the tub, it seemed to finally relax, but as Clark went about making his breakfast he realised he’d need to feed the thing, too. In fact, it was dawning on him that the thing edging more into the ‘alive’ category and further away from the ‘half dead’ one, meant he was going to have to start doing a *lot* more for it. Wonderful.

Clark opened the cooler beside the stove top, and looked at one of the fish inside. He gave it a cursory sniff, and when he found it wasn’t totally inedible, he brought it over to the thing. “You hungry?”

The thing didn’t nod or speak, but it did lift its hands towards the offered fish and all but snatched it from Clark, bringing it to its lips and gnawing on the skull.

The grimace on Clark’s face could neither be called subtle nor unjustified. “*Ew.*” He let out as he saw its tongue snake into the eye socket.

At least it's able to feed itself, Clark thought as the thing slowly made its way through the fish. That alleviated one of the burdens, at least. It still left a bunch for Clark to deal with, but for now he was happy he could at least leave the thing alone, knowing it had been tended to.

In the end, he didn’t do nearly half of what he wanted to do with his day, but he simply blamed the thing and moved on. Tomorrow would be a new day, and so would the day after that. In fact, with each one that passed he would be brought closer to the day where he’d finally be rid of the thing and be alone once more. That was what he had to focus on.

If he didn’t, he might go mad.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 2, done B)

I hope you all enjoyed it! Also, I just wanted to say I am so happy to hear all of you guys are hyped for this fic. Honestly, it motivates me so much to read all of your lovely comments, so I just want to say thank you for leaving them <3

Catch you all next time ;D

Chapter 3

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 17th 2016

The thing is looking better. Hopefully that means it'll go soon.

Despite the new addition to the household, very little of Clark's daily routine changed.

His days were still spent largely the same; either fishing, fixing things around his home or boat, or sleeping. Of course he now had to tend to the thing in the tub, but other than that, things weren't so different.

He was having trouble keeping track of the days, though. Sleeping didn't help; especially with how broken his nights were becoming. Had it been seven or eight nights since the thing invaded his home? He couldn't remember anymore.

According to his journal entries it had been closer to two weeks since 'the arrival'. Clark found writing in his journal everyday was at least a somewhat reliable method of keeping track of the days. He did sometimes forget to write, which was how he ended up forgetting his own birthday until Diana was stood at his door, cake in hand ready to remind him.

Really, aside from having to lift the metal tub out onto the beach to let it sit outside for a bit and do whatever business needed tending to, it was easy to take care of. Sometimes it would try and talk in that God forsaken screech, but though the advent of pointing and gestures Clark was able to prevent it from shattering any glass trying to communicate.

Every time Clark did take him out to the water, he half expected to see an empty tub when he'd go to collect it. The thing would get out of the tub, now without needing Clark's help, but it never strayed far, opting to sit in the shallow water, and only occasionally edge its way into the deeper area under the jetty. It was apparently still incapable of swimming, or just didn't trust itself to not die immediately after leaving the relative safety of Clark's island. Either or.

After the first few days they fell into somewhat of a routine. Clark would wake up, lift the tub in his arms and take it out onto the beach and set it on the lapping shore, letting the thing do whatever it needed to, then come evening Clark would come back to refill the tub and carry them both back inside.

The routine also gave Clark some much sought after solitude. Being alone for over three years made having even a mute lump for a roommate too much to bear at points. Even though he knew the thing couldn't understand him, it had still taken to looking at him when he'd talk to himself. Its ears quivering at the sound, its eyes curious and bright. Clark found himself keeping quiet to avoid those looks, he didn't like the attention it gave him, so having it out of the house for most of the day was a win win for him.

There was a problem, however.

With the thing less dead something became very apparent. It was nocturnal. When it was half dead it slept through the nights. Now however, it slept during the day, having taken to doing so underneath the jetty causing Clark to tread quietly along the planks, lest wake it up, when he'd have to go to his boat.

The thing however showed him no such courtesy when *he* tried to sleep.

During the night it made noises, sounds that reminded Clark of a cats trill. When Clark ignored them, they'd grow louder until he was doing those same awful screeches that rattled Clark to his core.

He soon realised he preferred it when the thing was half dead. At least when that was the case, it was his own concern that kept him awake at night and not the fact that the thing was an inconsiderate asshole.

When it would screech at him during the night, Clark would carry it back out to the water. After an hour or so of fitful sleep Clark would be woken to the thing calling him once more and he'd reluctantly retrieve it.

After the nightly 'swim' it would be quiet at least, but somehow Clark could *hear* it looking at him, it's unblinking eyes creating a cacophony of sound where there was none. It would be silent and yet, when Clark opened his eyes to the idea of a sound, he'd find those eyes on him. Watching him.

Despite the stares, the cries and the occasionally splashing of water. Clark was able to get some sort of rest every evening, even if it was short.

Of course, leaving him outside during the night was a thought he had when he realised it was nocturnal. Especially with how every evening he was now having to carry it outside and wait for it to call him just to drag him back in, anyway. He could just ignore him until he got the hint. He had brought headphones a while ago for the very purpose of ignoring mermaids, so it seemed fitting to use them now.

One particular evening, he found out why he wouldn't be able to do that.

According to his journal, it had happened on the 14th. He had been walking back inside after carrying the thing out, his feet shuffling through the sand and his mind focused only on planting his face directly into a pillow, but before he got there he heard something. The thing was making noises again, but they didn't sound like they usually did.

He nearly ignored it. He wanted to, but something in the sound told him he had to look, so he did. He turned around and when he did, he saw them.

There were heads poked up from the water close to the shore. In fact, there were a number of them. *Is this his pod?* Clark thought to himself as he heard them talk to one another with their chirps and calls.

But none of it sounded friendly.

No, very quickly Clark knew this wasn't the thing's family. They were the same sort of mers that would sometimes come to his island and call for him; he supposed the general hostility was due to them never having to deal with a mer *already* being there.

The thing itself was providing more than its own fair share of aggression in return, screaming at the bodies in the water as it batted its hands against the sand, teeth bared.

The others grew quiet at the display. They simply watched and waited. For what, Clark couldn’t say. For him? For the thing?

The thing then became silent too, tensing its body as though primed and ready to attack, and as the seconds ticked by Clark half expected it to do just that; to charge at them and do what Clark could only imagine got the thing onto his beach in the first place.

Clark however, didn’t want to tempt fate by letting this go on any longer, especially with how well it was already healing. The last thing he needed was for it to undo all of his hard work by trying to take on a pod of mermaids alone. He sighed as he walked over to the thing and picked it up easily, throwing it over his shoulder.

The thing yelped as Clark adjusted him. He then turned away from the mermaids and reached down for the tub with his other hand. He ignored the thing as it trashed and screamed, trying in vein to escape his grasp and go towards the suddenly vocal mermaids in the water.

He set the tub down and all but threw the thing in it. He sat on his bed, his tiredness forgotten for the moment as he looked at the thing.

Maybe he should have let them fight, best case scenario his mermaid problem would get solved. Worst case scenario however involved a lot more near dead mermaids littering his beaches. The thing didn’t seem pleased by Clark's decision either way, growling as its hands gripped the metal of the tub so tightly Clark thought it might dent.

After a while it seemed to calm down, ducking down into the water and growing quiet. It still didn’t sleep despite the energy it exerted; its stayed awake and watchful, its eyes never leaving the portion of the beach still visible through the open door.

Clark debated closing it, but in the end didn't. For one thing, the idea of having to get up from his bed to do so made his brain hurt, and in his sleep addled mind he decided he just didn't care enough. If the thing wanted to climb out of the tub and go into the water to fight the roaming mers, it was free to do so; Clark wasn't going to stop it again.

Eventually, sleep did come and sure enough when he awoke, it was still in the tub.

In fact, every night after he woke, Clark would be surprised to still see the thing there.

It looked bored out of its mind, but it was still there.

It would perk up when it saw Clark start to stir, and Clark would have to ignore it as he got up and got himself ready. Once he had taken care of himself, he could then go about making sure the thing was dealt with. Not before.

He wrote in his journal, and when he returned from the outhouse and saw it still sat there that he wondered why he didn't get up out of the tub itself. The door was open, he wasn't too far away from the shore line, and it wasn't as though it still wasn't capable of getting out the tub itself. It looked fine now.

But there it was, still waiting for Clark's help. His resentment was palpable as he lifted the tub outside and waited for the thing to get out and shimmy its way into the water.

He didn't know what triggered it, but after he emptied the tub, he didn't refill it. Opting instead to take it back to his shack and put it back under the bed. Where it belonged.

When he walked back outside the thing was still sitting in the water, not making its way to the jetty as it normally would. Instead it was looking at Clark, its head cocked to the side.

Clark knew it wouldn't be able to understand him and yet he still spoke. He moved closer, waving his hands outwards as he did. "Go on. Get."

The thing didn't move.

"Get!" Clark yelled, kicking some sand towards it for good measure. "You're all healed up now. You don't need to be here anymore, so fuck off."

Clark didn’t hang around any longer, already feeling his ambivalence towards the whole situation setting in. It was whilst he cooked breakfast and caught sight of the tub now under his bed that he felt a stab of guilt go right through him.

He walked back onto the beach and looked for the mermaid in its usual spot under the jetty.

It was not there.

He gave a cursory look out into the water and didn’t see anything other than a school of tuna swimming off in the distance.

“Good.” Clark said to himself, ignoring how his stomach wriggled uncomfortably at the thought of what he had just done.

He didn't care, he tried to tell himself, hoping for some small part of his earlier hatred for the thing to come back and squash the feeling of unease in the pit of his stomach, but it didn’t. In fact he wasn’t feeling much of anything in that moment.

He hated those things with a vengeance. Would have happily let the thing rot if it weren't for the hassle it would have caused.

But he hadn’t done that. No, instead he went out and looked at the thing. Saw its pretty face, and got sucked in just like every other idiot who ever dealt with a mermaid.

At least he got rid of it. That thought at least did something to comfort him. It was gone now, and Clark would never become one of those saps who preached for mermaid rights, just because the thing chose *not* kill him.

It wasn’t even that it could. That was the hilarious part of it all. The thing was none the wiser as to what he was, what he could do. To it, he was just a normal fisherman, and a small part of Clark wanted it to realise that he was anything but. Wanted it to know that even if it wanted Clark dead it

wouldn’t happen, and Clark would laugh if it had tried, as though the greatest joke of all time had been told.

He finished his breakfast and made his way out onto the jetty, cursing to himself when he realised he was treading carefully. He stomped the rest of the way for good measure and sat himself on the end of it, hoping the act of fishing would block out the doubt he was feeling.

It didn’t.

Chapter End Notes

The end :)

I'm kidding! Blue will of course be back ;) But for now, who knows where he will go, or what Clark will do without his lump of a room mate. Tune in next time to fine out ;D

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter! As always, lemme know your thoughts! Until next time :D :D :D

Chapter 4

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 18th 2016

I had a weird dream last night.

I dreamt I was deep down under the ocean. There was nothing around for miles and I floated down there for what felt like hours. Even now, when I close my eyes, I swear I can still feel the water.

Clark thought with the thing gone he'd finally sleep well. In a way he did, and in another, he didn't.

Take last night. It had been blissful in its lack of nocturnal mermaid activity, but in lieu of that, something else chose to occupy his mind.

A dream.

He tried to rationalize that as far as dreams go, this one wasn't a bad one to have. He was lucky in a way, as he'd had a few dreams when he first got to the island that were anything but empty and the way he'd feel come morning was a lot worse than the way he did at the moment.

The strange part was Clark couldn't put his finger on *why* it had unsettled him. It wasn't a bad dream, per say. He'd had worse. A lot worse. It was just that nothing had actually happened; it was unusual for its complete lack of anything noteworthy.

When he awoke and tried to piece together the fragments of it all, there was very little for him to actually make sense of. He had been deep down in the ocean, that much he was sure of, but he couldn't make out anything through the murkiness. There was no light all the way at the bottom. It

was complete darkness, that not even an errant fish interrupted. He was completely alone. Just him and the water.

But in and amongst that emptiness there *was* something else, it was the only reason Clark could think of that led to him waking with a shiver despite the warmth in his cabin come morning.

A part of himself knew there was something out there in the water. The entire time he was floating there, he half expected it to show up. What exactly he was waiting for, he didn't exactly know, but as he floated there in the water, the only thing consuming his mind was that there was something coming and at any moment, he'd see it.

Then he woke up.

As the dream faded, the feeling of anticipation went with it, replaced only with a vague sense of unease that wouldn't leave no matter how much he tried to push it away.

A part of himself wanted to focus on it, maybe there was something the dream was trying to tell him and he'd need to focus in on it to understand, and yet, another part told him to keep away from thinking about it, to block it out like he had all his other dreams and move on.

But boredom, combined with little else going on in Clark's life now that the lump was gone meant he couldn't help but revisit the dream as the day went on. The strangest part of it all was that Clark couldn't even remember a time he had actually gone into the water, apart from... ~~Metropolis~~. *No, it was before that. The water was calm. There were no screams, no concrete, no-*

~~No?~~

Don't.

The longer he pondered, the more the presence of a faint memory came to light, and the longer he stayed on it the more it began to flesh itself out. Yes, he hadn't been in the water since-

Since...

Since?

~~*Don't.*~~

Clark shook his head, willing his mind to other things. He had plenty of experience doing that at least, and as such by mid afternoon, he had almost completely forgotten about the dream and was able to go about his day in relative peace.

With the thing no longer present, the island had returned to its usual state. Clark spent most of the day ensuring everything was in working order; from his boat to his tools. He tended his small plot of crops, the bed of flowers on the other side of the island, and finally as the day wound down, he sat on his jetty fishing until the sun had hidden itself once more.

He liked to think he was doing okay, to think otherwise was to invite a whole host of unpleasant thoughts into his mind, but as he sat staring at the bobber floating along the surface of the water, doing his best to not dwell on his dream, he couldn't ignore the uncertainty from yesterday and all the days before it creeping back up on him.

The thing had not come back to the island. Some small part of him thought it would have done, but another part wondered if the reason it hadn't was because it was already dead. He tried to rationalise that it was fine, that it was alive. So what if it was still a bit worse for wear when it had left? The likelihood of it actually dying not even twenty four hours after leaving was surely minimal.

But that was it, it was only minimal, not nonexistent. As such, it was still very much a possibility.

He thought to the mermaids he saw in his water that night. At the thing screaming as they simply watched . Would they have found it in the water when it left? What would they have done now that there wasn't a beach between them? Would it have been able to take them?

Clark sighed as he reeled in the line and unhooked the small fish from the end. He placed it in the bucket, and thought about throwing his line in once more, but the monotony of fishing was not helping to distract him like he hoped. He picked up his bucket and walked back into his shack.

During the night, he sat in his bed watching the shore through his open door way. He didn't know why he had taken to sleeping with it open, but as he fell asleep his eyes trained on the water he knew

his night would be occupied with the same dream as the night before. He could only hope he was wrong about there being something waiting for him in the waves.

Chapter End Notes

Just a short lil update. Hope you all enjoyed! If you did, please be sure to let me know! I love hearing from you all :'D

Until next time :D :D

Chapter 5

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 21st 2016

I thought I saw it last night.

I could see its head poking out of the water, watching me. By the time I got up from the bed and walked toward the shore, it had sunk back down into the waves. Thing is, when I woke up this morning, I can't say if I really saw ~~him~~ it, or not.

Maybe I was dreaming. I really can't tell anymore.

March 26th 2016

~~. Fix engine~~

~~. Tend crops~~

~~. Get supplies~~

Went to Cottonwood today. Lucy said I looked nice. I think it's the shirt I was wearing.

March 27th 2016

I know I saw it this time.

It wasn't dark yet, I had just gotten in from fishing and when I looked out toward the water, it was there, I know it was there.

~~*He*~~ *It tried to hide, but I saw.*

March 29th 2016

The engine died again. Last night I ended up stranded in open water, I was laying in the cot all night just waiting for the mers to show up, but they never did.

Maybe they know to keep away from my boat? I can dream, can't I?

In the morning I flew back to shore to pick up my tools, and managed to fix it up enough to get it back to land. Need to remember to get a new engine tomorrow.

March 30th 2016

~~*. Get new engine*~~

Reminder: Do not go to 'Ole Sal's' again. Sal is an asshole.

April 2nd 2016

Diana is here.

He finished writing the words and got up from his chair. The door was closed but he could see her standing just outside, her hand hovering over the wood as though she were still contemplating her visit. She eventually rapt on the door, and Clark opened it.

She looked him up and down, the corner of her mouth quirking downward as she did. He didn't know if it was due to the shaggy beard which he had to assume was not looking too great, or the wrinkled shirt he had been wearing for well over a week now. Could have been both. Could have been the smell even. He bleakly realised there were a lot of things a normal person may take umbrage with in terms of his hygiene.

"Clark." She ended up saying.

"Diana." He said, his voice coming out huskier than he anticipated, he cleared his throat. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

She didn't come inside the shack. She rarely did. She opted instead to pull Clark out from his 'hole' as she had taken to 'not-so-affectionately' calling it, and walked them out onto the beach. Clark didn't have any shoes on but that didn't stop her as she started to walk along the shore line. "I haven't heard from you in a while, how have you been?"

"Fine." Clark said evenly. He had been, for the most part. The thing had all but left his mind. ~~Has it really?~~

"Just fine?" Diana asked in that gentle voice she used on children and evidently, Clark.

"Yes." Clark bristled. "Diana, why don't you just tell me why you're really here?"

"I didn't realise I needed a reason." She frowned. "I told you, I haven't heard from you in a while, so I came to check up on you." She folded her coat over herself, despite it being April there was still a chill in the air. Clark barely noticed it.

He rolled his eyes, hoping he had been subtle but when Diana whirled on him, her anger palpable, he realised he hadn't been.

Clark held up his hands, hoping to prevent another rant before it started, but knew the odds of that were slim. "Hey, don't look at me like that. It's just that I don't *ask* you to check up on me, okay?"

"No, but if *I* don't, *you* sure as Hell won't." She stopped and pulled at the collar of his shirt with the tips of her fingers, as though wanting to keep in minimum contact with it "Look at you, Clark." She made a face as she wiped her hand on her side. "You look and smell like a locker room floor."

"Well, you *did* drop in unannounced." Clark muttered, though there was little venom there. Truthfully, he knew that even if he *had* received a warning from Diana, the likelihood of him doing anything with that information other than flee, was next to none

"You let me know how I can arrange a visit, I'll do it. Until then, I'll keep doing things my way, okay?" She walked away from him, and Clark had no choice but to follow after her.

"Look, I know you worry, but all I'm saying is you don't have to." He reached for her, his fingers brushing against the fabric of her coat. He marveled at how soft it was. All his clothes were coarse with sea salt. It was surreal to feel something that hadn't been tainted by the sea in some way.

"I know I don't *have* to." She sighed, turning to him. "Clark, we're friends. Friends look out for one another and I like to think if the situations were reversed you'd be doing the same thing for me. In fact, I hope you would."

Clark folded his arms; the fledgling burn of anger welling up inside. "Don't do this."

"Do what?"

The burn grew. "Don't throw the 'friend' card at me."

Diana's face slowly morphed to one of incredulity. Whatever rant he had managed to prevent was going to be coming back with a vengeance, apparently. "The ' *friend'* card?" She asked and despite

the thunderous expression, her voice was remarkably even.

Well, no use in backing down now. Clark squared his shoulders. “Yeah, the friend card. It’s how you try to win every argument. You pull it out and wave it in front of me until I do what you say. Every time, without fail.”

Diana’s mouth fell open. “How can you even say that?”

“Because it annoys me that you make this about you. How *you* feel about me living here. How *you* feel about how I dress. You you *you* .”

“Because you don’t seem to care about how it affects *you* !” She threw her arms out, storming towards him. “You don’t care that you’re wasting away out here. You would happily die out here all alone if you could. I come here to make *you* realise that there are people who still care about *you* , despite how much *you* want to forget that!”

“I’m not ‘wasting away’.” Clark tried to look somewhat earnest as he spoke, but Diana didn’t appear to be buying it. “Look Diana, I know it's hard for you to realise but I am happy out here. I enjoy being alone.” He said, and Diana’s eyes only filled with pity.

“Clark, you’re not happy. You *were* happy. You were happy in Metropolis-”

“Nope.” Clark cut in before she could keep talking. He walked away, shoving his hands in his pockets. “Don’t do this. Not again.”

“No. Don’t walk away from me, Clark. You *need* to hear it! Every time it’s the same, you act like you're over what happened, but you're not. You need to *talk* about it instead of living in this self inflicted prison!”

“This is not a prison!” He yelled back, his hands curling into fists. “I can leave at any time, I just don’t *want* to, why can’t you just see that and let me be?”

“Because you're lying to yourself! You feel guilty, and this -*”* She gestured around herself. *“*- is how you deal with that feeling, can’t you see that? *This* is your punishment. You’re atoning for what you did, but Clark you did nothing wrong. I saw what happened that day and you did everything you could. Lois would-”

He was gone before she could finish.

He hadn’t flown far, just to the other side of his island by the bed of flowers, but eventually Diana got the hint, flying away and leaving Clark to seethe in peace and quiet.

He stood by the flowers for what felt like hours. Eventually he made his way back to his house, sitting back on the desk and opening his journal.

April 2nd 2016

Diana is here.

Why does she always do this? Every time I see her it’s the same shit, over and over. What does she want from me? I don’t change my shirt for a week and suddenly I’m in need of professional help? She's delusional.

I don’t ask for her ‘opinion’ and she gives it anyway. I don't need her. Maybe one day she’ll see that.

Maybe I could find another island? And then <u>not</u> tell Diana where it is, this time.

He slammed the book shut. He still felt awful. His stomach wriggled uncomfortably as he tried to push her words from his mind. She didn’t know what he felt, that's what pissed him off so much. She acts as though she knows him more than he knew himself, just like-

He cut off that thought before it would swell up in his mind and cut off all other thoughts. He got up from his bed and reached for one of the books on his shelf, not caring which one. He flipped it open and tried to focus on the lines on the page instead.

It took awhile but eventually he managed to tune everything out. The rest of the day passed him like a breeze. Soon it was evening again, and then before he knew it, it was morning. It seemed as though he'd blink and a new day would be dawning. He put the book down and rubbed his blood shot eyes.

He opened his journal.

It had been two days since Diana.

Chapter End Notes

Ohohohohoho, now we're getting into some plot (°ʖ°)

Diana does not get paid enough to put up with Clark's shit. Anyway, this was another lil chapter but the next one is longer B)

I will say now however, that I will be starting a new job in Dec so sadly I won't be uploading every week anymore. Don't worry, I don't want it to get as bad as it was when I was writing Infinite and Sunshine (Y'all remember those 9 month hiatuses, those were f u n) but it will probably be longer between updates for a lil while. Once i'm more settled in my job I hope to get it back to semi regular updates, but we shall have to see!

I will say you're lovely comments and kind words are what keep me going, so lemme know your thoughts! And I will catch you all next time!! <3 <3

Chapter 6

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

April 14th 2016

I had that dream again.

I've been having it nearly every night. I don't even know what to think about it anymore.

As Clark awoke that morning, the tendrils of his dream clung to him. The feeling of tight pressure all around his body, the sound of water, that same feeling of anticipation. Every morning he'd wake and hope that this time he'd receive that burst of clarity he so desperately sought; that single thought that would finally let him know what he was seeing every night, but that didn't happen. Instead, he'd only experience that same cloudy sense of ambiguity that told him it was for the best he didn't know.

He looked down at the short journal entry he had made and brought his hands to his face.

He really hated to admit it, but perhaps Diana was onto something. The journal wasn't working like it used to. It seemed no matter how much he wrote he didn't feel better. He remembers a time, long before he came to the island, where he'd speak to Dinah about the minor or major problems that plagued his mind. In hindsight, those worries and fears seem laughable. A cruel joke that only sought to torment him. One in particular began to rise to the surface.

'But Dinah… What if I'm terrible? What if I do everything wrong?'

'Clark, that's part of the experience, besides-'

He groaned as he crushed his fists into his eyes. It didn't hurt, but the pressure against his skull helped to smother the errant thoughts once more. *This is why you don't think about Dinah, why you don't think about any of them, if you do you know you'll think of-*

~~*Who, Clark?*~~

Not. Now.

Closing his eyes, he willed himself to empty his mind. He succeeded somewhat, but was reminded of what pulled him down into the newly emerging pit of his mind the moment he looked down at the words before him.

He had thought the dream was about a time before Metropolis, but Diana's visit had him second guessing that idea. Now, it was as though everything was bringing him back to that day. He didn't want to admit that though as the torrent it would unleash if he did would break him and he knew it.

After a few more moments of forcefully squashing down any thought that chose to make itself known, Clark reached for the page of his journal and turned it to the entry from the day before.

April 13th 2016

~~*.Collect rainwater*~~

.Sell tuna

Ah yes. The tuna. He had been lucky whilst fishing the day before, and managed to catch a good number of skipjacks and thanks to some plastic crates and ice breath, he was able to chill them until he could go out and sell them. He could have done it yesterday, but it was already getting dark by the time he was finishing up and he knew Lucy's would be open early the next day, anyway.

He passed a comb through his hair, but as some of the knots were too matted for the comb to deal with, he instead settled for swiping his hands over to try and smooth it down. He then got dressed, throwing on some clothes that he hoped didn't smell too terrible. As he eyed the pile of dirty laundry on the floor, the thought struck him that he could do some washing whilst at Cottonwood. There was a small laundromat on the island that was far superior to Clark's bucket and soap method and it would mean Diana wouldn't grimace at him so much when she next came to harass him.

He wasn't going to do it, of course. But he could have done.

The trip over was uneventful. He saw a few mers as he got closer to Cottonwood but it nothing to get too worried about. It was generally known that the more populated an island was, the more mers liked to pester and stalk the shores. He supposed that's why he only dealt with them infrequently at best. Unlike Cottonwood.

Clark ignored their calls as he hopped from the boat, his arms laden with tubs of tuna. He walked through the streets, recognising a few of the locals. He passed by Ole Sal's and barely fought back the frown when he saw the old man through the window. Of course he couldn't blame him for being more than a little jaded when they'd last spoke. Making a living out here was hard. Clark knew that first hand.

He saw Lucy's general store ahead and pushed open the door with his shoulder. He was not prepared for the barren shelves before him, nor the clearly stressed cashier behind the counter. Her eyes went wide as Clark walked up to her. He nodded to the doorway leading to the back. "Lucy here?"

The girl nodded, getting off of the stool and walking through the curtain separating the two rooms. After less than a minute, a small woman walked in. Her hair was pulled back, revealing strands of silver in and amongst the blonde. Her glasses were askew as she squinted at Clark, a smirk pulling her lips. "You're a sight for sore eyes. You do something with your hair? It looks nice." Her attention soon went from Clark to the crates he held. "Please tell me that's for me."

"Who else?" Clark said as he set down the tubs, patting the top one with his hand. "What will you give me for em, Luce? It's skipjack. Got about twenty in all."

She sighed, her hand gesturing to the empty shelves. "Not much, as you can see. I got cash up the wazoo, but I know you prefer-"

“Naw, if you got money, I'll take the money.”

“You sure?” She crossed her arms. “Tom should be bringing in some milk later, I can give you the lion's share?”

Clark shook his head. “Yeah, I’m sure. I’m thinking of heading to Redding from here. I can spend it there.” He hadn’t been planning that at all. Truthfully, he didn’t like straying too far from his island, but the barren shelves told him that was his only choice if he wanted to get some supplies.

She pressed her lips together. “Only if you're sure.”

“Of course.” He nodded. “Now come on, this stuffs fresh, you need to get it out quick.” Lucy walked to the register and opened it. After she handed over the money, Clark didn't count how much she gave him as he shoved it into his pocket. He knew she would give him a fair price. It was why he went to her and not the other vendors around Cottonwood.

Clark looked around the room once more. “I take it things haven't been going well.”

She sighed as he wrote down his receipt. “That's putting it lightly.” She muttered. “With Colin’s boat gone, no one’s been heading up to Redding, and no trips to Redding means I can’t replenish my stock, so we’re making do with what we have here, which as you can see-” She waved her hand around. “Isn’t much.”

"Can't you get the folks at Redding to bring the stock over?”

Lucy laughed at that. “You should see the prices they quoted us when we called and asked. You’d think we were asking for each crate to have a personal escort. We’re desperate, but if we pay what they want, it would bankrupt every trader on this island.”

“What about the nets? You must be able to catch something with them. Enough to keep you going, at least.”

“They’re gone.” She said quickly as she began to move the crates one by one to the back. “They went a few days ago actually, some mers came in and cut them all, so now we’re trying to get what we can with the lines, but still.” The girl from earlier stepped out and began moving the crates to the back instead, allowing Lucy to sit by the register, her head in her hand. “I’m doing what I can Clark, taking whatever people can give me for the goods I have, but when I run out and haven’t got anything else to give, people start getting desperate and desperate people don’t tend to act rationally.”

Clark knew that first hand. “What are you low on?”

She laughed. “Everything. Fuel, food, fresh water. You name it; we’re out.” She brought her hand to register once more and opened it, gesturing to the crumpled notes shoved inside. “The only thing I got any amount of is this shit.”

“So how many boats are left?”

She thought for a moment. “Sal, Antonio, Porter and Steve still got theirs, and Sal’s boy has one too, though it's a rusty old thing. You’d think Sal would be able to fix his own boys boat up, but what do I know. I ain’t a mechanic.” She shrugged. “Anyway, Antonio, Steve and Colin used to be the ones to go to Redding for us but after Colin lost his boat, nobody else wants to go out and use theirs.”

“Well, they’re gonna have to.” Clark said, crossing his arms. “What? Are they just gonna let you all gonna starve instead?”

Lucy huffed. “You’re telling me. I tell them we need food or we’ll starve and then they just talk about the ‘shipment’, and you better believe I’ve been down to that dock and yelled at Porter till I was blue about the Goddamn ‘shipment’. Everyday he says to me ‘tomorrow Lucy, tomorrow I promise’.” She shook her head. “I swear sometimes those idiots at the shipping office have no idea what's coming and going and just wing it and hope for the best.”

Clark narrowed his eyes. “What's this about a shipment?”

Lucy crossed her arms and sat back. “We don’t get all of our supplies from Redding. Each trader gets their basic stock every week in the Sacramento shipment. You know, things like bread, flour, fresh

water, etc. Thing is, we haven't gotten one in about two weeks now. Porter swears blind it's coming any day now, but I don't buy it. He had too much flop sweat for someone telling the truth."

Clark nodded, more to himself than anything. "I don't know what I can do about the missing shipment. But whilst I'm at Redding, I could gather some things up for you."

Lucy perked up at that, her hand going for the register. "In that case…" She pulled out a selection of notes, sorting them into a somewhat neat stack and holding it out to Clark. "Here, it's what I'd pay the boys to get my stock for me. Take it."

"Luce, I-"

"Yes you can." Her face was resolute. "This-" She waved the wad of money around, "-means *nothing* to me right now. When people are hungry, and there is nothing to go around, money ceases to have value. If you go to Redding, you can get my stock for me. Talk to Simmons, he runs the wholesaler there. I'll call and tell him you're coming on my behalf-- in fact, i'll tell him you're coming on the whole island's behalf. A bunch of other traders are waiting on their Redding orders so if you picked up there's too I know they'd be eternally grateful and hell, I will personally give you a discount for life for helping me outa a tight spot."

Clark reached for the money, his lip quirking upwards. "For life, huh?"

As Clark gripped the stack he felt Lucy's grip tighten for a moment, a playful smile on her lips. "For a week. Month tops."

Clark rolled his eyes. "Ever the pragmatist. Thanks, Lucy." He went to the door. "I'll be seeing you."

She sent him a smile. "Damn right you will. Don't think I won't come for you if you don't bring me my crates."

He waved goodbye, but before he made his way back to the docks, Clark stopped by Sal's. He had intended to try and find Antonio and Steve, but given he didn't know them beyond a name he settled

for Sal’s instead. The old man's head shot up the moment he stepped inside and Clark held up his hand as the man's mouth fell open. “The engine’s fine. Where's your son?”

Sal closed his mouth, turning his head. “Marcos, get in here.”

A young man walked in, rubbing his grease stained hands on a cloth as he came from the doorway behind the counter. “What?”

Sal jutted his head towards Clark. Marcos opened his mouth. “Look, if this is about the engine-”

“I'm not here about the engine.” Clark said blandly before continuing. “I’m here ‘cause I hear you know the guys who usually make the trips up to Redding to pick up stock for the traders.”

Marcos nodded. “Well yeah, but they’re not going anywhere at the moment. If you need something, I’d talk to Lucy, she-”

“She got jack shit and you know it.” The two men looked away and Clark went on. “Look, I came here for a reason. I'm asking if you could tell me where they are. I’m making a trip up to Redding myself and I figured if anyone else wanted to come and help, they could.”

Before Marcos could respond, Sal held his hands up. “Not happening. Colin barely got out alive when the mers sunk his boat, it's too dangerous to go anywhere right now.”

Clark frowned. “Yeah and that danger ain’t going anywhere. The mers aren't going to just go away on their own and all of you are going to starve in the meantime.”

Sal pursed his lips. “We’re just waiting on a shipment from Sacramento. It's gonna come in any day now.”

“Sure and in that time, how many of you are gonna have to go hungry? You got kids on this island, don’t you? How many of them are gonna starve ‘cause you’re all afraid of a few mers?”

Sal's frown only grew. "Look, we've dealt with this before, we can deal with it again, so why don't you just go on and head back to your little island, *forastero* and leave us alone."

Clark ground his teeth. "*Fine* , I was just offering because-- as I mentioned already-- I'm going there to help all you people, but fuck me I guess." He burst out the door, his pace quick as he marched towards the docks.

It was as he was unmooring his boat with more vigor than was strictly required that he heard footsteps coming towards him. They were quiet, as though the person making them was unsure of each step. He turned and watched as Marcos came to a stop before him, his arms crossed. Clark didn't say anything as he waited for him to speak, and eventually he did, his voice just as quiet as his steps had been. "Hey, I wanted to apologize. I know my father can be an asshole, but it's because he's scared. The Sacramento shipment was meant to come in a week ago and it didn't, Porter says he's tried calling them but they gave him the runaround. We need supplies but-"

"So come with me." Clark said easily.

Marcos gulped as he looked out to the water. "But, the mers…"

"I know you're scared, but when I tell you, you don't have to worry, I mean it."

Perhaps it was due to the truly desperate situation or maybe he actually believed Clark's words, but Marcos eventually nodded. "Okay… I just need to talk to Lucy and-"

Clark simply nodded. "I already did. She's gonna call Simmons and tell him we're coming. We're also picking up the other traders orders whilst we're there."

Marcos tilted his head. "You know for an outsider, Lucy trusts you a lot."

"She's desperate." Clark said easily as finally finished unmorring his boat. Marcos went to his own,

which happened to be right beside his. Clark didn’t say anything about its less than stellar appearance, but had to agree with Lucy’s summation that it truly was a rusty old thing.

Marcos however didn’t seem to pay much mind to the condition of his boat, as he simply shook his head at Clark’s words. “Lucy is too proud for that, even if she were desperate, she wouldn’t ask for help from someone she didn’t trust.”

Clark shrugged as he went to start the boat. “Maybe it's my smile, then. My Ma always used to say I had a nice smile.”

Marcos didn't look convinced but only gave a small shrug of the shoulder as he hopped onto his own boat.

Clark’s boat took the lead, with the dinghy that he was apparently to call Marcos’ boat following after. Of course, Clark couldn't say much. The only reason he had a nice boat was because he found it. He had to assume it once belonged to some rich family, as it was closer in specs to a yacht than a fishing boat, but some storm of another brought it out into the open water where Clark eventually found it. Sal on the other hand, most likely built this one to sell and when no prospective customers wanted it, it became his son’s.

At first that wasn’t an issue. The small boat managed to keep up with Clark’s with little issue, and even when a few mers brushed past the side as though testing its durability, they didn’t linger after that, as though admitting it wasn’t going to tip with the amount of mers present. Six, Clark counted, and after their brief appearance they disappeared down into the water once more.

The problems arose about thirty minutes into their journey.

Redding wasn’t that far from Cottonwood. An hour by boat at most, and unlike with Cottonwood, the mers became less of an issue the closer you got to Redding. It was a rather busy port for shipping and trading with other nearby islands, and unlike Cottonwood, Redding was far more capable of dealing with the mers that chose to try.

The thing was, they weren't close to the island yet, they were still in open water and as such the threat of mers was very much a possibility.

“Fuck.” Clark heard the quiet expletive though he wasn’t meant to. When he turned towards Marcos’ boat, he saw it start to slow down.

Clark didn’t need to be told what had happened, the sudden silence of the boat's engine told him enough. He cut his own engine, and made his way to the port side. “You alright over there?” He called out.

Marcos turned to him. “The engine died.”

“Great.” Clark said flatly. He looked out towards the horizon and saw the barest glimmer of land way off in the distance. “I’ll pull in closer. I got rope, I can tow you the rest of the way.”

Marcos didn’t object, not that Clark thought he would. He didn’t really have a choice in the matter. It was either this, or staying stranded until someone else happened by. As such, Clark started his boat once more, and pulled in just in front of Marcos’. He bumped it, which ordinarily would have at least caused a quiet sorry to come from Clark’s mouth, but when he stopped the boat and came to the stern and saw that the dent he made was indiscernible in and amongst all the others, he said nothing.

He went to his cupboard and pulled out two long reels of rope and made his way onto the swim platform at the back of his boat. He nodded towards Marcos. “Tie this end around the railings on the bow, then climb over and hop onto my boat.”

“Climb over?” Marcos asked, looking at the foot of choppy water that separated the two boats.

“Yes, climb over.” When Marcos’ expression didn’t change, Clark sighed. “You won’t fall in.”

“But-”

“You won’t.” Clark stated firmly. “Now come on, mers love to fuck with stranded boats.”

He’d said it to try and hurry him, but they way Marcos’ hands shook as he tied the knots around the railing told Clark he probably should have omitted the word ‘mer’. The worst part was they weren’t

poking their heads out, but they were here. Clark could see them swarming underneath the boat as Marcos tied the knots. Twelve of them now.

Eventually Marcos crawled out across the bow, and with the help of Clark, hopped onboard. Clark grabbed the other reel of rope, and tied each end to the side rails of his own boat. He then grabbed the end of the rope connected to Marcos' and went about tying the two together.

In the midst of tying the knots, he heard a sharp exhale. "Oh, fuck." Marcos yelped, and when Clark whipped his head around he saw the reason. A single mers head poked out of the water, just beside the swim platform. Marcos quickly scrambled up the steps, away from it.

Clark eyed it, saw the way those eyes followed his movements. He held onto the rope tightly.

The mer flung itself onto the boat and Marcos let out a scream unlike one Clark had heard in recent memory, it hit him like a punch in the gut, the fear, the desperation, just like-

He let go of the rope and went to the mer, reaching for its neck and lifting it high in one burst of movement. Its gills convulsed as water poured from them. It let out growl, fierce and low as its hands scrambled at Clark's arm, scratching at his skin in vain. More mers poked their heads out of the water, watching Clark.

"You fucking piece of shit." He growled. "I should kill you."

His hand tightened, as though contemplating that idea, and yet, when the mer turned those frantic eyes onto him, he didn't. He instead went to the edge of the platform and flung the mer out into the water.

The mers screamed as it flew across the water, and when its body splashed against the waves, it, as well as all the others that had been with it, retreated back down under. Clark looked down at his own hand, at the salt water and slime that was still covering it and let out a long sigh.

"Oh my fucking God." Clark barely registered the voice at first, but when he did he turned slowly towards it. "You're..." Marcos' eyes were wide, his voice was full of awe. "You're Superman."

The word caused Clark to wince. "I don't go by that any more." He muttered as he picked up the rope.

Marcos however, wasn't done, he scrambled back down the steps onto the platform beside Clark. "I can't believe it! You are! You're Superman!"

"I-" but Clark didn't have the rest of that sentence planned and as such let that single syllable hang in the air as Marcos continued to stare at him with those same bright eyes. "It's really not the big of a deal." Clark settled on.

"Not that big of a deal?" Marcos scoffed. "You can fly, you can shoot lazers from your eyes, and you're saying it's *'not a big deal'*."

The lazers, right. Clark paused. He always forgot about the lazers. "Yeah, well, I don't do any of that any more."

"Right, I heard after the Metropolis tsunami you went awol."

Clark closed his eyes, taking a breath. "Uh huh."

Perhaps Marcos had more tact than Clark gave him credit for, as he dropped that line of conversation quickly, opting instead to clear his throat and send a shy smile towards Clark instead. "I won't tell anyone about you being… you know."

"Thanks." Clark ended up saying, and despite how flat it was, he actually did mean it. At least, he thought he did.

He finally finished tying the knot and let go of it. "Right, stay near the back and holler at me if the ropes become undone."

"Sure." Marcos said, his earlier trepidation now completely gone. He even sent him a mock salute as Clark climbed the few steps off of the platform.

Before he reached the top, Clark heard the slapping of a body on wood.

He barely had time to turn, as did Marcos, who stumbled back and away from the mer now on the platform with him. He was too slow, as its hand snaked around his ankle, tugging him down. When Clark caught its face, he knew it was the same one from before. By the time Marcos hit the floor with a shout, Clark was rushing over to them.

But he didn’t have to pull the mer off of Marcos.

Because another mer did it for him.

Clark grew still, looking at the mer now on top of the first. "You." He let out.

The thing looked at him, its teeth still firmly in the spine of the other mermaid. The injured mer twitched, its hand spasming around Marcos’ ankle, and before it could try and escape, the thing pulled back and brought both hands to the mers neck, snapping it easily. It then let go, looking up at Clark with what he could only assume was fondness.

"Oh my God!" Marcos yelled as he scrambled away from the mers, kicking the dead one in the head for good measure. He went to Clark, clinging onto his ankle.

The thing growled, his eyes narrowing at Marcos.

"Hey." Clark bent down and bopped it on the head. "Don't growl, you ingrate." Clark stood up and with the leg not currently being used as a safety blanket by Marcos, pushed the corpse into the water. The thing went with it, taking the hint and not needing Clark’s foot to assist. He didn’t go back into the water fully however, looking towards Clark as the body bobbed in the water next to him.

Clark didn't know what to say. “Uh.” He cleared his throat. “Thanks for that.”

The things ears pricked, and when it turned to the floating mer, it pointed at it.

“Yeah.” Clark said with an emphatic nod. “Thank you for killing that mer. It was bad.”

It pointed once more and this time went back to the bite mark it had made earlier on its neck, gnawing at it and peeling the flesh from it off in large chunks.

“Uh.” Clark looked away. “Yeah, sure, just eat the-” he swallowed down the vomit that was threatening to come out. “We better get going.” He muttered as he not too subtly shook Marcos off his leg.

The rest of their trip to Redding was thankfully uneventful. Sure enough as they grew closer to land, the amount of mers in the water lessened considerably until there was not a single one, and Clark was able to get his and Marcos’ boats to the dock without much fuss.

Of course there was the issue of actually fixing the boat once there. Marcos was insistent on handling it on his own, especially after the mechanics at the dock told him how much it would cost if they were to take a look. Between the tool boxes both Clark and Marcos were carrying on board, he was able to patch the engine up, hopefully enough to get it back to Cottonwood.

Clark in the meantime went about acquiring the supplies. He brought his own first, carrying the small boxes to his boat and setting them inside. He then went to Simmons, and didn’t even say anything before the man inside was ushering him into the back room. “Lucy called already, says you’re here for hers, Carl’s and Morgan’s supplies, that right?”

“That’s right.” Clark said, and with that, he and Simmons began to move the crates onto his boat.

The last two crates that couldn’t fit on his were placed on Marcos’, thankfully it was just two crates as Clark doubted it would have been able to handle even a fifth of the load Clark’s was carrying. To be fair, Clark didn’t know if his boat would be able to handle it either, but only time would give him the answer to that question.

Once the engine and supplies had been taken care of, Marcos insisted on looking around Redding for a little while longer. As neither man had eaten since the morning they visited a local sandwich shop and picked up some lunch.

They didn't eat inside as Marcos told Clark about a small park that was nearby. Clark was almost shocked when he heard the word. Parks were a waste of space on most islands, with most councils putting the space to better use whether that be for farming or buildings.

Then Clark saw that Marcos really did mean small when he said it. Clark wouldn't even call it a ‘park’ as it felt more like a communal garden. It was wedged between a few buildings and it consisted of little more than a square of grass and a few benches. Marcos went over to one of the benches and sat on it, and Clark did the same, sliding in beside him.

Despite how small it was, there was something about sitting outside with grass under his feet that gave Clark a small burst of nostalgia. He was reminded of when he used to work, how he'd sit at the local park on his lunch break and watch the world go by. He allowed himself to indulge in that feeling, before squashing it down and eating his food.

Marcos was quiet for the most part, and Clark wasn’t one to start conversations at the best of times, so they sat in silence. Eventually however, Clark could see Marcos eyeing him in his peripheral, and when his mouth opened, Clark thought he’d be prepared for whatever came out of it.

“You don't need to worry about me telling anyone, by the way.”

Clark made a face as he turned to him. “You already said that.” He frowned as he caught his own tone of voice. He let out a small breath. “Which... I appreciate it.”

Marcos tilted his head. “Oh no, not about the whole ‘S’ man thing. I meant about your mer.”

That caught Clark, and he raised a brow. "My what?"

"You're a merner, right?” Marcos said as he took another bite from his sandwich, looking at the floor with rapt interest. “So, I just wanted you to know, i’m not going to tell anyone about that.”

Clark frowned at the word, his own food momentarily forgotten. “*Merner* ?”

“Yeah.” Marcos said easily, giving a half shrug. He looked up then, his stare sharp. “Mermaid lovers. It’s what we call you.”

Clark sputtered. “*What.* ”

“That dark one, that was yours, right?” He didn't seem disgusted, if anything he appeared blase about the whole conversation, taking another bite and chewing it as he kept speaking. “Mr. Albernathy has one, too. Keeps her in his shed. Thinks we don't know but he isn’t exactly subtle.”

Clark couldn’t think of words. They had all left him.

Eventually some returned.

“I want to make it clear. That thing you saw, is simply a nuisance that is bothering me for its own amusement.” He ground his teeth, willing every fibre of his being into the words he was about to say, hoping that some- if not all- of hatred he felt would come across. “I cannot stand those things, much less ever *love* one. Hell, if it up and died, I would not care.” ~~*Liar.*~~

Marcos gave another squirrely shrug. “Sure man, sure…”

“I mean it.” Clark muttered, though he wasn’t sure who he was saying it to.

“Hey, you do you, man.” He got up and threw his wrapper in the bin. “Must get lonely on your own little island, so like, I get it." He gave a somewhat sympathetic look to Clark before he went to sit back down. "Just maybe don't broadcast to the rest of the town, cause not gonna lie, my dad's '*this* ' close killing Mr. Albernathy's.”

“For the last time.” Clark erupted. Thankfully, the boy had the sense to be afraid, leaning away from Clark’s hulking frame with a look of mild panic. “I. Don't. Love. Mermaids.” He ground out, his voice low and sharp. "I would happily watch every mermaid die from here back to Cottonwood, do you understand?"

“Yup.” Marcos said, eyes wide. “I got it.”

Clark turned away, leaving Marcos reeling. He stood up and went over to the trash can, throwing his half eaten sandwich away. His appetite suddenly gone. He'd hoped the boy would drop it by the time he returned to the bench, but sure enough. "You wouldn't hurt Mr. Albernathy's mer, would you?"

Clark made a face as he let out a long breath. "I don't even know him."

"Yeah." Marcos said, looking away. "But you said you'd-"

"It was a figure of speech." Clark muttered, wiping his face. "Anyway, why would you care?"

Marcos looked at his feet. "I told you. I *get* it." He held his hand up when he saw Clark's expression turn sour. "Don't get me wrong, i'm fucking terrified of the mers, but if a nice, pretty one wants to shack up with a human, who am I to judge? Especially in Mr. Abernathy's case. His wife died not too long ago and he was in a bad way, but then he started getting better, Hell, he was happier than he had been in a long time."

"Sure enough, when me and my father went to go visit him, I got a peek into his shed. He'd made a little pool for her and he sleeps in a cot next to it. My dad wanted to kill her then and there but I managed to calm him down. Told him that as long as he was happy, what's the issue?" Marcos sighed. "I don't think my dad agrees but I don't blame him. Mers have fucked us over time and time again, so the fact that one is living on the island, much less with a friend of his, must be hard for him to deal with."

"So you worry about her?" Clark asked.

Marcos shook his head. "Not her. *Him.* If she were to die I know Mr. Albernathy wouldn't want to live for much longer. I think that's what my father doesn't get. He thinks she's gonna kill him but doesn't get that killing her would give him the same fate."

Clark sat forward. Curiosity wiping away his earlier annoyance. "You think she would kill him?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. If she's been with him this long why would she do anything now?"

“Right.” Clark said slowly. He didn’t know what he was feeling, but eventually he managed to get a hold of himself long enough to end whatever caused him to indulge in the conversation in the first place. He stood up. “We should get going.”

Marcos however, remained sat. “I guess that's one thing you got over Mr. Abernathy, even if your mer wanted you dead, it’s not like it would be able to do much.”

“I told you it's not my-” but Clark only sighed. “Look, let's just head on back, we may have eaten but the others haven't.”

“Right.” Marcos said, getting up from the bench.

Back at the boats, Clark half expected to see them both sunk down in the water under the weight of all the crates, but that wasn’t the case.

It was as he stood on the docks and looked at the boats, that Clark got an idea. Actually, it was more of a hunch, but he figured there was no harm in following it. He told Marcos to wait as he approached the shipping office nearby.

“Hey there.” He called out as he opened the door. The woman at the desk looked to him, and when she did, Clark continued. “I don't know if you'll be able to help, but I figured any shipment from Sacramento comes via Redding, am I right in assuming that?”

“You are indeed.” The lady said with a nod. “But I will say if you're having a problem with your shipment, I'd contact Sacramento's offices directly as we just follow the orders given to us from them.”

“When you say orders.” Clark said, leaning against the desk. “What exactly do you mean-” he glanced at the woman's name badge, “Heather?”

Clark liked to think he still had some of the Kent charm and that was indeed proven if the way the woman started to play with her hair was anything to go by. “Oh, well, the shipments from Sacramento are rather large and our port is the only one nearby that can process them. So the ships come here and

the crates get put onto smaller boats and sent to the nearby islands, like Manton and Cottonwood, and the-”

“Speaking of Cottonwood.” Clark interjected, as he set his hands on the counter. “They didn't get their shipment from Sacramento this last time.”

Heather frowned. “Well, it left here no problem, and the boat didn't sink going there, so it is definitely on that island.”

Clark’s mouth fell open. “Do you have proof of that?”

“I do, but-” she looked off behind her, before turning back to Clark. “I'm not meant to show it to just anyone who walks into this office.”

“I can appreciate that, Heather...” Clark said softly. “But I just want to get to the bottom of this and figure out where this shipment is and I'd be thankful if you could help me do that.”

Heather frowned, but Clark must have been able to pull off puppy eyes better than he realised as eventually she relented. “Okay, I'll show you the invoice. It will have all the info on there.” She typed at her keyboard and when she was done she turned the screen towards Clark. “See? It was signed for and everything.”

Clark looked at the screen, his eyes darting between the lines on the page. He saw the date that it was ‘meant’ to come in was indeed the date it did, he saw the time of delivery was requested at one am, and most importantly he saw the name of the man who signed for it. “Porter Connoly.” Clark muttered.

“Is that all you need, hon?” Heather asked, turning her computer back around.

“Yeah.” Clark said with a firm nod. “I think it is.” When he saw Heather's gaze still on him, he leant back down towards her, smiling. “Thank you Heather, you're a star.”

She grinned brightly as she batted her hand. “Oh, it was no trouble.”

He left soon after, and upon finding Marcos sitting on the dock he approached him. “Alright, lets go.”

“What were you doing in there?” He asked, standing up.

“I was just asking about the Sacramento shipment as it gets processed here.”

“Oh.” Marcos said, tilting his head. “I dunno what they told you, but Porter’s been doing that non stop since it went missing.”

“I bet he has.” Clark muttered as he hopped onto the boat.

When Marcos went onto his own boat, he started the engine and thankfully it came to life and unlike the previous stint across the water, this one was not marred by mers.

Clark also wasn’t expecting much upon their arrival, but when they came into the dock there was a short man standing there, with a face so slick with sweat it looked like it had been dunked in the nearby water. He wiped his hand on his jacket before extending it to Clark as he came off his boat. “You must be Clark.”

“And you must be.” Clark’s eyes stayed on the glistening forehead. “Porter.”

“Yes.” He said with a crisp nod. He moved past Clark and peered onto his boat, his hands clapping together when he saw the stacks of crates. “Lucy told me you were going to Redding, I’m glad to see your trip was a success.”

“Yup.” Clark said, crossing his arms. “Managed to pick up the traders orders.” Marcos jumped down from his own boat and approached.

“Hey Porter, are you here to help us move the stock?”

“I am indeed.” He said with a smile. “Though I don't know how much use I’ll be compared to you boys.”

“Don't worry, me and Clark can do most of it.” Marcos said, hopping on Clark’s boat and picking up a crate. “I'll take this over to Morgan’s and come back for another.”

When he was gone, Clark made no attempt to grab one for himself, making a point to keep his attention on Porter. The other man also didn't move, standing still and clearing his throat. “I wanted to thank you personally for doing this, with the others not going up to Redding, it was getting a bit hairy here.”

“Right, I can imagine without the Sacramento shipment people were getting pretty desperate.”

“Ah.” Porter let out, becoming so still that Clark worried a breeze might tip him. “Yes, they were but now, we have supplies once more. So there is no need to keep worrying about the other shipment.”

“I mean, you should still try and track it down, it was odd that it just seemed to…” Clark pressed his lips together. “Disappear.”

Porter cleared his throat. “And that is indeed what I will be doing once we’ve handled this, now, if we could just start to…” he rolled up his sleeves and approached the boat, but Clark’s leg darted out to stop him.

At Porter's wide eyes, Clark’s own narrowed. “But hey, if you're doing your best to track it down, you shouldn't have anything to worry about. It's not like you have anything to do with this, afterall. Unless, of course...” Clark said, leaning back. “You do.”

“What?” Porter let out, stumbling back. “How dare you, I-”

Clarks lip quirked up. “I found something interesting whilst I was at Redding. I went to their shipping office and had a nice little chat with them. I know all about you rescheduling the shipment to arrive at

midnight, I know you signed for it, so I know you must still have it. Now I don't know who or if anyone else was in on it with you, and if they got a cut, but I do know that if I wanted to ruin you all I'd have to do is go back there and get a copy of that document and show it to everyone on this island."

Porter was white as a sheet, and eventually it looked like he was going to faint, Clark let out a short chuckle that turned into a sigh. "But i'm not going to do that. I'm not going to tell anyone about Sacramento. You're more useful this way, never know when I might need a favor." At Porter's sigh of relief, Clark stepped forward, his hand gripping his shirt collar and tugging it tight. "But if you *ever* do something like this ever again; I will come to your house, pluck you from your bed, and dump you in the middle of the ocean and watch as the mers eat you alive."

Porter didn't say anything, but eventually his head moved in what Clark assumed was a nodding motion. Marcos was soon running back down to the dock. Clark let go of Porter and stepped back. When Marcos reached them, he stopped and eyed them both. "So am I moving all of these crates myself or what?"

"Don't worry, Marcos." Clark said, stepping onto his own boat and lifting three of the crates up. "Me and Porter are right behind you, aren't we Porter?"

Porter nodded again, this time more firmly. "You bet I am." He said, his voice quaking.

With Clark, and Porter to a lesser extent, now helping; it didn't take long for all the crates to make their way to their respective traders. He personally brought over Lucy's, and eyed the line of people already waiting outside, waiting to be served as he brought the crates inside.

He saw his tuna were already out, surrounded by crushed ice and a little sign dictating their price. Lucy didn't have time to stop and chat as she was busy unpacking crates and selling their contents at the same time. Even though no words were shared, the look she sent Clark spoke volumes and after he dropped off the last one, Lucy mouthed a quiet thank you before turning towards the next customer.

Back at the marina, Marcos was still there and Clark came up to him. "Anymore crates?" Clark asked, even though he knew there weren't.

Marcos shook his head. “No, I just don't really wanna go home right now. I know my dads gonna bite my head off about going to Redding without telling him.”

“No matter what he says, you did good today, alright?” Clark crossed his arms. “You helped everyone on this island, and without you they'd still be going hungry.”

“I mean it was all you.” Marcos said, chancing a small smile. “But I appreciate the sentiment.”

“If it was all me, then...” Clark said as he reached into his pocket and pulled out the notes Lucy had given him earlier. “Why did Lucy tell me to give me your share?”

“She-” Marcos’ eyes went to the money. “She did?”

“Yeah.” Clark said, dividing up the pile and holding half towards Marcos. “She said 'at least Sal’s boy isn't as big of an asshole as his dad'.”

Marcos smiled at that. “That does sound like Lucy…” he gingerly reached out for the money and looked over it in his hands with awe. “It's so much.”

Clark shrugged. “It's what she'd pay the others to get her stock.”

“Right.” Marcos said distractedly, his eyes still on the money. “I-” he looked up. “Thanks.”

“No problem, now.” Clark shoved the money back into his pocket. “I better be heading home.”

“Right!” Marcos said, as he too put the money into his pocket. “I'll see you next time you're here. Be safe, Clark.”

“Thanks. See you soon, Marcos.” Clark said as he went onto his boat.

As he sailed home, he looked back towards the island. He could see Marcos still stood on the marina, the money back in his hands as he poured over it. Porter was sat inside the shipping office, his head in his hands as a quiet string of words left his mouth in a language Clark didn't know. When he focused even more, he could hear Lucy's voice ring out as she worked. He turned back towards the front and fought back a smile as he heard her mention to all who entered that today's special was tuna.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter! I know y'all wanted Blue so I hope his little cameo was enough to keep you all going.

I also just wanted to say I love the idea of Marcos seeing Blue and being like 'ah yes, this is clearly the mer this grizzled loner would attract. No doubt.' XD

Anywho! Be sure to let me know if you liked this chapter, your kind words are what keep me going and I love to hear from y'all! Until next time! (also thank you to all who wished me luck with my new job, I really appreciated it, you guys are the best istg <3 <3 <3)

Chapter 7

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

It's HEEERE.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

April 15th 2016

So it turns out I forgot to buy toilet paper at Redding.

Thank God I had some old rags lying around, because if I had to go all the way to Cottonwood without wiping I think I would have ascended to a level of filth that even I would have taken issue with.

Lucy was doing good. Apparently the skipjack was a hit, but luckily the folk down at Cottonwood are starting to go out with their boats again so I'm not going to have to become a full time fisherman slash courier. Also means I finally got to meet 'the boys,' as Lucy called them.

Turns out; Colin is an ass. Antonio, is an ass, and guess what-- Steve? Also an ass.

At first I figured they were all jaded due to the mers, but now I reckon they were all just born like this.

I really can't say much, as according to most; I too, am also an ass.

April 19th 2016

So the thing showed up again.

~~He~~ It was swimming in the shallow water near the island, and when I went onto my dock ~~he~~ it swam up to me, chirped and ducked back down into the water. I saw it poke its head up a ways away, and it called again.

I don't know why I followed it. I think It's cause I had nothing planned for the day. I sort of wish I didn't bother as ~~he~~ it ended up just leading me to my usual fishing spot. Just bobbed there in the water watching me, so in the end I just started fishing.

After a few hours I went back, and that was my day.

April 20th 2016

I can't believe it. The dream was different last night.

When I looked out in the water, I could see something in the distance. As I went towards it I woke up.

Clark couldn't believe it.

After seeing the same thing every night, it was somewhat jarring to wake up with the realisation something had been different about his dream.

Not by much, mind you. He wasn't gallivanting in space with flying unicorns or anything, but at least he was seeing something other than the vast emptiness of the ocean.

That was the strange part about it all, Clark realised. That deep down, there was no light and yet he distinctly saw something. It wasn't illuminated, it was just there.

Being Kryptonian probably had something to do with it. Even in the blackest of night, Clark could still see the world around him clearly. He supposed that down in the ocean was much the same. Or it could just be good ole fashioned dream logic. Yes, any night now he'd dream of a lamp down there with him, a chaise lounge, maybe even a few flying unicorns for good measure.

But he knew that not to be true. He knew what he was seeing was real, in a sense. That what his mind conjured up would be what he'd see should he actually venture down there. His eyes would pick up whatever was before him as though he were viewing a vague idea. Something that was tangible and yet completely invisible. Outlined in light that didn't exist, and yet something his eyes could pick up with ease.

The dream was still far beyond Clark's comprehension, however. He was sure some psychiatrist somewhere would tell him what he was seeing and why, but for now it was just him and with little more than ocean water and the vague notion of something in the distance to go off of, he decided to keep his wandering thoughts away from it once more. Whilst he had seen something, he knew it wasn't what he was expecting, what he knew was down there. That came later. This was--

He stopped himself.

He tapped the end of the pen against the pages of the journal, as though debating whether to write more down. In the end he chose not to, setting it down and closing the book. He didn't even bother looking to the day before for what to do today. He knew he had to water his crops and flowers and then clean his boat, and beyond that he was free to do as he pleased.

He stood up and went outside. The sun was still low, leaving the world around him a faded hue of blue, with only a few speaks of pink and yellow creeping out from the horizon. He stretched and breathed in deep, taking in the air. He felt good, in fact he felt better than he had in awhile. The fact that surprised him should have been a red flag, but like most red flags in Clark's life he chose to ignore it for the time being.

Perhaps the dream being different did more for his mood than he realised. Or maybe it was because the weather was nice today. Really, Clark's mood was as fickle and changeable as the wind, so trying to attribute it to anything was usually a fool's errand.

It was the knowledge of this fickleness that caused Clark to not so much as pause when he suddenly felt a wash of dread. It was fleeting, touching him for barely a moment, and then as quickly as it came, it was gone. As though being swiped away by the breeze itself.

At first he ignored it; choosing to attribute it to one of the many reasons Clark had to feel dread at a moments notice.

But this however, was diffirent. Even as the feeling lessened, it still seemed to linger around him, and no matter how much Clark tried to go back to the earlier feeling of peace, he couldn't. He felt compelled to do something, his body filled with pent up energy. As he raked through his mind trying to figure out what it was he felt a compulsion to do, he finally came across it.

He'd been fishing yesterday. He fundamentally knew he didn't need to go again today, and yet, a part of himself that he could neither define nor name, told him to go, urging him with such devotion that Clark practically ran onto his boat, turning it on with shaky hands, and pressing onwards despite still being dressed in his pajamas.

What he felt was beyond him. The feeling itself was all too familiar, but just what the cause of it was, he couldn't understand. Was it the dream? Was it something else entirely? He just didn't know.

After fifteen minutes of fitful sailing, he heard something. There was a commotion somewhere off in the distance, not too far from where he usually fished.

Clark turned his head towards it, and when he focused in on the sound, he could see it was coming from two boats a ways away. Mers were probably the cause, they often were when they chose to harass fishermen. He thought nothing of it, keeping his heading the same.

Then he heard a familiar scream.

"Oh, *fuck* ." Clark muttered as pulled hard at the wheel, veering it in the direction of the two boats.

He kept his eyes firmly ahead, and after what felt like hours he finally pulled up beside the boats, waving to the occupants frantically as he stepped out onto the deck. He was sweating, more so than he should have been given the cool air. "Hey!" He called out.

Everyone on the boat looked at him. There were three men in total, all of whom looked vaguely familiar, and with a start Clark knew why. They were from Cottonwood. In fact, he'd met them all only a few days prior. He knew their names, and more importantly, he knew what they did with the mers they caught swimming around their boats.

Clark's eyes slid from the men to the thing by their feet.

It's eyes were wild as it writhed around in the net constricting its body. It was marred in cuts, its flesh torn. The screams it made were primal as it tried in vain to bite the ankles of the men around it. When that failed it turned to Clark, its mouth working around sounds that sounded like they could be words. Despite not knowing the words, he knew what was being said, knew it in the way anyone with basic empathy would.

The man who held a harpoon over the thing, looked at Clark. He knew his name was Antonio, knew the other two men were Steve and Colin. They said nothing in terms of greeting, simply waving Clark away before turning back to the mer before them. "We got this handled, alright, you can get going." Antonio said, having to step away slightly when the thing managed to wiggle towards his ankle.

"What are you doing to that mer?" Clark asked, his heart hammering faster. He didn't even realise his hand had curled tighter around the metal railing until he felt it give. Why was he panicking? He knew he shouldn't be, knew in his heart there was nothing to fear, and yet, no matter what he thought, his mind and heart raced leaving his body feeling as though he was running a marathon.

Antonio let out a breath. "God damn fuckin' *merners.* " He muttered under his breath. He turned back to Clark, his scowl evident. "It was swimming around our boats, alright? We're gonna deal with it, so get going. This doesn't concern you."

"It does." Clark said, and without an invitation, jumped the railing and climbed onto the other man's boat with ease. They reached for their waist belts, one even going as far as to unholster his gun fully, but Clark held firm. "I can't let you hurt that mer."

Steve frowned. "Or what? You gonna fight us, Kent?"

Clark squared his shoulders. "If I have to."

"Jesus Christ." Antonio said, wiping his face with his free hand. "These things are the reason we

nearly starved last week. Are the reason we struggle to survive every day and you want us to just let it back out into the water and act like none of that happened?"

"Actually, you nearly starved 'cause you were all too chicken shit to go get supplies." Clark stated as he crossed his arms. "In fact, i'm actually shocked you're out here now. I figured this one mer would have had you shitting yourselves."

"You got a lot of nerve." Colin muttered, lifting his gun up, though his hands shook considerably. "Do you know what it's like to be on a sinking boat when the mers are swimming all around you, just waiting for you to get into that water so they can pull you down? It would make you chicken shit, too." He narrowed his eyes. "Maybe we should show you what that's like."

"I wouldn't advice that." Clark said, already worried this was going to end up going even worse that he initially thought it would. "Look, I'm sorry for what I said-" ~~*no you're not,*~~ "-I just want you to let the mer go, after that, you can do whatever you want."

"Whatever we want, huh?" The first man said, toying with the harpoon in his hands. "What if I want to drive this into this mer's heart and watch it bleed."

"Then i'd throw you-" he pointed to Antonio, "then you-" he turned and pointed to Steve, "and then you-" then Colin, "into the water."

"Big talk considering it's three to one." Steve said with a condescending grin.

"I don't want to be the one to have to tell you this, but if you try and fight me, it won't go well for you." The men didn't back down, but something in their posture changed, as though they knew Clark meant what he said, and what's more, it was completely true. "Besides, none of us want that, so, let the mer go and i'll leave. Simple as that."

"What do you think, Colin?" Antonio asked, idly playing with the harpoon in his hands. "You think we should let it go?"

"I suppose we could…" Colin said as he eyed Clark. Then, something flashed in his eyes. "But we couldn't possibly let it leave without a souvenir."

“Couldn’t have put it better myself.” The first man said with a nod, and in one swift movement, lodged the end of the harpoon into the things tail, right into the meat of its thigh.

It let out a choked breath, before screaming so loudly that even Clark winced in pain. The three men before him hunched over, covering their ears. Though it proved to be in vain as they began to howl in pain right along with the thing. Eventually the first man managed to tug the harpoon free, and screamed at Clark. “Fucking take it, take the thing and fucking-”

He didn't manage to finish before he was curled on the floor with his hands on his ears. Clark went for the thing, scooping it up in his arms and rushing towards the railings. He knew it wasn’t strictly possible for a human to vault the railings and hop back to his boat whilst carrying a writhing mer, but with the only other people here being incapacitated on the floor, Clark took the chance.

Once he was back on his boat, he all but flung the mer onto the floor before rushing off to start the engine, speeding off before the men on the boat started to get back up.

His heart was hammering, and his ears still rang with the echo of the screams, but the thing had at least grown quiet. It was still whimpering and trying to reach for its tail, but with the netting around its body it couldn't do much other than writhe and cry. Clark wanted to help it, but with the other boats still nearby and his island being close he figured it could hold on until they were safe. *It has had worse* , Clark told itself, thinking of the first time it washed up on his beach. *It will be fine,* his mind continued.

It ended up repeating those words the whole ride back to the island. It was the longest fifteen minutes of his life, but it was now over. They were safe. The thing was safe.

Clark turned and saw it limp on the floor, having given up on trying to escape its bindings. Clark ran past it into the kitchenette. He roughly opened a drawer and found a small knife within. He grabbed it and went back to the thing. “Alright, don't wriggle.” He murmured, crouching down beside the thing and setting his hand on his flank. “I'm gonna get you out of this shit.”

The thing cried out again, but it wasn’t sharp, it was pitiful and Clark’s frown only grew. “Shh, it's okay, I got you, hold still.”

He slid the knife into the netting and with little trouble, clumps of it started to come away. It was course in texture, and where the thing had been writhing left its flesh further marred by divots of rubbed raw flesh. Slowly, Clark managed to cut it all off, and once that was done he was left with the sight of the mer before him.

It looked awful, everything his mind had done to convince him it'd had worse had gone out the window. However, it was still conscious, and despite the deep gash in its tail it slowly sat up, and when its face was level with Clark's, it began to lean towards him.

Clark was taken aback at the movement, falling completely still as he felt its arms wrap around his torso, its head coming to rest on his shoulder. It was shaking, it was bleeding, and it let out what Clark could only describe as a sob as it held onto him.

It's... hugging me. Clark thought to himself, his mind suddenly growing blank. He knew he should probably move, should try and get the thing inside so he could see to his tail, but instead all he managed to do was to bring his own arms around the thing, holding it as it let out a few more quiet sobs.

Eventually it grew quiet, and its cries turned into those quiet chirps Clark was used to. He decided there was no point in delaying the inevitable any more, so lifted the thing up easily from where they sat.

Unlike the last time Clark had brought it into his shack, it was conscious as he brought it inside, choosing to rest its head on Clark’s shoulder as he walked, it’s tail wrapping around Clark’s torso stability.

Once inside he set the thing on the bed, and reached for the tub, then went to fill it. It was as he brought it back inside and placed it down that he realised *why* he didn’t do that last time. The spot where the thing laid now had a large patch of blood and saltwater across its surface.

He lifted the thing from the bed into the tub, and tried to hold back the grimace as he eyed his ruined sheets. At least he had a spare set. The only problem was that he’d now need to go to Cottonwood to clean these ones, and he very much doubted he’d be welcomed back with open arms.

Maybe they won’t say anything. Maybe everything will be okay.

~~*Please, you humiliated them. They're going to make sure the whole island knows you're no longer welcome.*~~

Clark felt his heart sink, but ignored it in favour of the more pressing issue of the still bleeding mer. He went for the first aid kit, and even though the wound was in a far more tender area than last time, Clark was sure he could still handle it. For one, there didn't appear to be any organs in the things tail, and whilst he knew he could sew some stitches, organs on the other hand required far more knowledge and tact than he knew he had.

Clark didn't even know who he'd call if Antonio had aimed higher; if he'd gotten his stomach instead. He supposed the marine biologist was an option, but then again, that would require human contact and after today Clark was eager to keep that to a minimum from now on.

Once he was finished sewing a jagged row of stitches along the wound, Clark turned his attention to the other cuts and scrapes. It was as he went for the bandages that the thing reached for his wrist, holding it there as it shook its head from side to side. Clark frowned, "you don't want me to wrap them?" He supposed he could see why, if it went in the water they would get wet, but for now at least they'd help keep the bleeding at bay.

The things ears twitched, and after a moment, its eyes darted around the room. When they came across something on the desk, it pointed toward it.

Clark turned to the desk, and lifted up his journal. "This?" the thing shook his head. Clark moved onto the next time, lifting his pen. "This?" Another shake. Clark then went for his pencil holder and this time the thing chirped. Clark still had no idea what it was trying to say but he brought the pencil holder closer to it. "Alright, what now?"

The thing reached for the green ruler inside of it, and held it in front of Clark. Clark looked at it, and his frown only grew. "Okay…" At the thing's hopeful face, he sighed. "Yeah, I don't get it."

It pointed at the ruler, before waving it from side to side. It then plunged it into the water, and waved it again, before plucking it back out and holding it in his hands. It then pointed to the bandages in Clark's hand and gestured between the two of them.

“You want me to use the ruler like a bandage?”

The ears twitched, and when Clark didn’t move it let out a huff. It put the ruler into the water once more, and waved it around. This time when it was plucked from the water, the thing brought it to its lips and pretended to bite it.

“Are you…” but Clark's eyes blew wide. “Wait.” He said, and without another word marched his way onto the shore. He waded through the shallow water towards the jetty. He rooted around underneath it until he found what he was looking for. He pulled it up and went back to the shack and from the doorway held aloft the blade of seaweed. “This?”

The thing chirped, and threw the ruler aside. It was nodding frantically and Clark tried to not to smile, with mixed results. He went back to his seat, and using his initiative began to wrap the wound on the things arm with the seaweed, tucking the end in when he was done.

It looked at the seaweed, and after touching it nodded at Clark some more. It then pointed to the wound on his other arm, and Clark got the hint. He got up, and this time grabbed his cooler.

He filled it up with as many long strands of seaweed that he could find, but even when those ran out he grabbed a few handfuls of the small plants as well. He went back inside, and after tending to the worse of the wounds, he threw the small bunches of seaweed into the water and the thing let out a few more enthusiastic chips.

There were still some wounds that Clark couldn’t wrap in seaweed. Most of them seemed to be superficial however, and even in the short amount of time it had been sitting in the tub, they already looked to be getting better. There was a small cut still on the things nose, and Clark didn't know what possessed him but he found himself reaching into the first aid kit and pulling out a small band aid.

The thing chirped when he approached him with it, but didn't object as Clark pressed it on the wound.

It did however go cross eyed as it tried to look.

Clark tried not to laugh.

He failed.

“What? You never seen a band aid before?” Clark asked, his lips quirking up as he reached into the kit and got another one out, this time putting it on it's arm.

The thing reached for that one, using one of its long nails to peel at the edge of it and whining when it tugged on the skin. “Yeah, they hurt more when you pull at ‘em slow. You gotta-” Clark tugged it off sharply and laughed when the thing jumped, rubbing its hand across the tender skin. It growled.

“Yeah, I know. I’m an asshole.” Clark said softly. At the things petulant expression he let out another small laugh. “I’m sorry. Tell you what, I’ll let you get even.” He said, and went back into the kit. He pulled out another band aid and this time put it on his own forearm. He brought it in front of the thing and after rolling his wrist left and right, the thing let out a chirp and brought its nails to the edge of it.

With its talon like nails, Clark half expected it to rip the bandage apart. Hell, if he’d have been human, he would have expected half of his arm to go along with it, but no, instead the thing worked at the edge of it, and when it peeled up a little it managed to get a hold and ripped it off. It looked to Clark, and at its expectant gaze, Clark feigned a wince. “Ow.” He let out, as he rubbed at the skin of his arm.

It was as he watched the thing recline in the water, a small, but definite smile on its face, that Clark wondered what he was doing. It was one thing to have helped the thing when it washed up on the beach, but this was going too far, and he knew it. His stomach churned with uncertainty.

Just stop here. His mind said, as he got up and went to his desk. *Here is okay. Here isn’t too far.*

~~*But you won’t stop here, will you? Diana is right, you need help. Look at what being out here all alone has done to you. You’re turning to these things for comfort.*~~

No, I-

But he couldn’t argue with the voice. It was right, and he knew it. If he really didn’t care about it, he’d have left the moment he saw it was on that boat. He wouldn’t have cared if it died then and there, and yet, the thought of that happening ate away inside of him and had him growing faint.

He opened his journal, and underneath the words already written, he penned;

I think I fucked up.

He turned back to the thing, and when he caught those bright eyes on him he winced as he felt a flush of warmth run through his body. His hand moved of its own accord across the paper;

I really fucked up.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed! This chapter was a lot of fun to write. Blue was a cutie, Clark was a cutie. The boys were assholes, but we don't talk about the boys.

Anyway, as always let me know your thoughts! I love all your comments and they do everything to spurr me on :'D

Until next time!! :D :D :D

Chapter 8

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

April 21st 2016

The thing looks a lot better. Like, a lot a lot. I don't know what seaweed has in it, but the thing has healed up to where it doesn't even look like yesterday happened. I mean, it definitely did, but if I was just going by how it looked I could kid myself. I suppose the one thing I can hope for out of this experience is that it should now be a little more cautious around boats, but we will have to wait and see if that lesson gets through.

The wound on its thigh is still tender, but I managed to find a few more strands of seaweed at the other end of the island and wrapped it up so we will see if it helps.

April 23nd 2016

What do you know, it did.

Seaweed is magical, who would have thought. It's thighs look great now. It's moving around a lot more than ~~he~~ it did last time which I won't lie has me a little surprised. Even with how well its healing, I figured it would be a few more days until it healed up enough to move around on its own.

It just makes me wonder what the Hell happened to it last time. It was cut, bruised, beat, Hell, it even had a fricken harpoon lodged into its thigh and it's moving around the shallows like it was nothing.

Last time it must have been hit by the mer equivalent of a truck.

April 25th 2016

Okay, even though it's all better, it's still hanging around.

I don't want to kick it off the island again, but I don't know what else to do. I don't want it to get the wrong idea about this situation. Even after everything, it's still a mer, I can't let myself get sucked in. That's what it wants.

April 26th 2016

So, I think today is gonna be the day I try to 'persuade' it to leave.

It looks fine, moves fine, so it's not like it's going to die out in open water.

I'm thinking I'll just put it in the water and take the tub away again, I'm hoping this time it will take the hint and I won't have to kick sand at--

---

He didn't get a chance to finish that sentence.

"Oh, *fuck.* " Clark let out when he heard it; the sound he had grown to dread. He slammed the book closed and turned his now panicked stare to the thing lounging in the tub, none the wiser to what was about to occur. "*No no no no* ."

Clark raced out the door, and slammed it closed behind him. He knew he woke the thing when he

heard it chirp, but prayed to God it would stay quiet, but he didn't have much hope. He assumed like all the previous times he had prayed to God, it would fall on deaf ears.

Diana waved at him from where she had landed on the dock. Something about her feet walking along the planks triggered a Pavlovian response within himself, and he wanted to run. He knew that he couldn't, much less now that she had seen him, but especially considering what was in his shack.

She made her way over towards him, and whether it was because Clark had a better handle on his expression than he thought he did or because Diana didn't seem to notice the abnormal amount of sweat on his face, she simply smiled. "Clark, it's good to see you."

"Likewise." He said with his lips pressed together in a paltry attempt at a smile. Despite how terrible it must have looked, Diana beamed all the same, her smile growing if that were possible.

"How have you been?" She asked, bringing her hand to his shirt to smooth down his collar. As she lowered her hand, she wiped it on her pant leg and Clark couldn't blame her this time. He hadn't done any washing in a while now. He still hadn't ventured to Cottonwood since the 'incident'. Given how much sweat and body odour was now ingrained into the fabric; he was certain they'd stiffen like cardboard if he stopped wearing them so his solution was to just not change his clothes.

It took him a moment to process what was being asked, given how hard he was trying to split his attention between Diana and the thing inside. It still hadn't moved, but it gave another chirp from within, one which had Clark opening his mouth to try and cover. "Yeah, I've been good." He said far too loudly.

Diana's face didn't change, which Clark was somewhat happy about. He didn't know if he could handle her overly maternal shtick right now. "That's good." She said as she let out a breath. "I was worried after last time you'd still be mad at me."

Last time? Clark had to rack his brain, but when he did he was confronted with the shitshow that was Diana's last visit. He had managed to push most of it out of his mind, and it was remarkable how quickly he felt his ire grow at being reminded of it. "Oh yeah, *that* ."

Diana sent him a small smile. "I actually came to apologize. I know I can be hard on you sometimes,

but its just because I worry." She looked out towards the shore. "I will say the more I come here the more I understand your decision. This place... It somewhat reminds me of Themyscira. It's peaceful."

Clark let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. "Yeah. It is." He said, letting his shoulders loosen as he leant back against the door. "I told you. It's nice out here."

"And that's why I came here today. Not just to apologize, but to try and understand your way of life. I know you resent me worrying, so I thought a way to settle it, at least for the time being, would be for me to see for myself what it is you do here; how you live. After that I promise to only keep my visits to your birthday." She said, sending him a playful smile. At his silence, she went on. "Well, your birthday as well as any other dates I feel are important."

Clark's silence wasn't brought on by an attempt at banter as Diana seemed to assume. It was for a reason that very much had to do with what was currently in his home. Clark's stomach dropped. "That's not really necessary."

"It really is." Diana said firmly, her arms crossing. "I'm not backing down on this Clark, either you agree to this now or I come here every week to keep tabs on you."

So i'm fucked if I do, fucked if I don't? Clark's mind supplied as his body shook with nerves. "Uh, it's just, i'm not, you know-- this day is bad for me, 'cause Mercury is in-"

"Clark, stop it." Diana chided, shaking her head. "I've seen the stale of the hole you live in plenty of times, so just-" she reached past him towards the handle, and Clark's hand jutted out to grab a hold of it with a vice like intensity.

"Don't." He let out.

Diana pulled her hand free, her frown growing. "Why?" Her eyes narrowed at him. "What are you hiding in there?"

Clark's face grew red. "*What?* Nothing. Its just--" he tried to think of words, but they were failing him. "I don't *need* a reason for you not to invade my privacy. I don't come to your house and barge in like I own the place." He managed to get out as he blocked the door further with his body.

“Clark.” She said slowly, folding her arms. “What have you done?”

He didn’t get to answer. The thing did it for him. A quiet thump came from within his cabin and before long the sound of scraping began. Diana's bewildered stare flew between him and the door. “Clark.” She repeated, but she didn't go on, her brows knitting together in more than just concern.

Should he keep the door closed? *What was the point?* He could say he got a dog. *Yes, a dog, and he didn’t want Diana to see it because it was horribly deformed .* ~~*That is the dumbest idea you’ve come up with in a while.*~~

His mind raced as he tried to come up with any reason at all for what was happening other than the truth, because the truth was… He didn’t know what the truth was.

When no answers came, he let his head hang low. This was it. This was the moment he had prayed to God wouldn’t happen, and of course, did.

He opened the door slowly, allowing the thing to come fully into view. It was on the floor, peering up at them both. It growled at Diana and as it made its way out onto the sand, brushing up past Clark and letting its tail trail along his legs as it passed.

It didn't go into the water like Clark thought it would. Instead choosing to lounge on the damp sand by the shore, watching them both from afar.

Clark chanced a look at Diana and didn't miss the horror emblazoned on her face. “Clark.” This time as she said his name, her tone made it sound as though she were addressing someone entirely new. “Please tell me you haven't…” she leant on the side of the building, covering her face in her hands. “I knew you shouldn't be out here alone, and I didn't-” She let out a choked breath. “Hera, I am an idiot.”

“It’s not what you think.” Clark said for what felt like the hundredth time. “I’m not, you know...” He grimaced, “ *doing* anything with it, it just got hurt and I patched it up. Nothing else happened, okay?” Even though it was the truth it sounded like a lie even to himself.

~~*That's because you are lying.*~~

“Don't. Not now.” He murmured

“What?” Diana asked, her mouth agape as she looked at him. “Who are you talking to?”

Clark paused, his eyes growing wide. “No one, I was just-” but he didn't finish, swallowing thickly.

“Clark.” She moved to him, her hands reaching for his shoulders, holding him there firmly. “I say this as your friend. As someone who cares about you. Please listen to me when I say this. You *need* to see someone.”

Instead of having their intended effect, Diana's words only stoked something within Clark. He felt it bubble and fester the longer he looked at her sorrowful gaze, until he could feel it rise like acid up his throat. “What good would that do, exactly?” Clark ground out, not even attempting to hide his contempt.

Diana flung her hands out. “I don’t know, but I can't sit by and watch you crumble like this.”

“Then don't.” His eyes narrowed. “Leave.”

“No.” Diana said firmly.

He stepped forward. " *Leave* ."

He could see the tears in her eyes. "Lois wouldn't-"

"*Don't* say her name." Clark’s breath hitched. "You don't *get* to say her name. Ever. Understand?"

“Or what? Are you going to punch me, Clark?” The disbelief in her voice was gone by the time she had finished the sentence, leaving only a look on her face that told Clark that she already knew the answer to her own question.

Diana landed halfway across the beach, lodged in a sand dune that she erupted from in a flurry a moment later. As she stared at Clark, there was no shock on her face, no disbelief, she only looked resigned as she patted herself down.

“I know you didn't mean that.” She said, and despite how much Clark wished for the wind and sea to come and block out her voice, they didn't. He could still hear her despite wishing with all his might that he couldn’t.

She was back in front of him, looking at him once more with those sad eyes and the anger bubbled up again. *“Leave.* ”

“Not until we’ve talked about this, I know you’re mad at me, I know you think i'm the bad guy here, but-”

“No.” He cut her off, and Clark ignored the way she braced herself when he lifted his arm. “You are going to listen to me, and I will not repeat myself. Get off my island, never come back, and if you *ever* say her name again, I will do a lot more than punch you.”

Diana huffed, her hands shaking. “So that's it, then? You’ve forgone humans-- the people who *care* about you-- for that… That *thing!* ” She said, gesturing to the mer on the beach.

“Damn it Diana, it’s not a-” but Clark stopped, his eyes growing wide. What was he going to say?

What was the rest of that sentence?

Clark didn’t continue. He was physically incapable of speech as every attempt to open his mouth was greeted with apparent paralysis. Diana took this moment to come closer, holding her hand out as though she were trying to pacify a wild animal. “I understand that the mers can do things to peoples minds, Clark. This isn’t your fault. It’s clear what has happened here. I know you didn’t want to do this, which is why we need to get you to someone.” She let out a breath. “You need to understand that what you’re feeling isn’t genuine and move past it.”

Her words made sense. He knew they did. Clark had thought them himself, but now, hearing them from Diana’s mouth only caused him to turn away, his hands curling into tight fists. “You have no

idea what i’m feeling.” Clark muttered. “You like to think you have this great insight into my mind Diana, but you don’t. No one does!”

“Then let me understand!” Diana pleaded, edging ever closer. “*Talk* to me, tell me what brought this on. Why are you helping this thi-” she took a breath. “This mer.”

Clark didn't have an answer for that question and as such, he looked away. “This is ridiculous.” He ended up saying, looking to Diana with enough fire in his stare to cause her to retreat, losing all the ground she’d covered. “You need to understand something Diana, we aren’t friends. We haven't been in a *long* time.”

Why was he doing this? He knew he was pouring gasoline onto a bonfire, and yet, he kept pouring.

Diana’s posture wilted. “You don't mean that.”

“I really do.” Clark said, keeping his face blank despite how much he could feel himself crumble. “You wonder why I never visit you? Why I ignore your calls? Why I want to leave the planet every time you visit?” He huffed a breath. “You think it’s ‘cause of Metropolis, but it’s really because I can’t stand you.”

Diana took a deep breath as she stood tall. “I know you’re trying to hurt me on purpose, and it’s not working because I know you’re lying.”

“That’s the thing Diana.” Clark said, looking at her straight in those watering eyes. “It’s working because you know i’m not.”

Her face twitched, and he knew he broke her. Knew it in a way that only a true friend would. The tears fell and Diana brought up her hand to wipe them away. "Fine. You win." She said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I can’t fight you on this anymore."

"I didn't ask you to." Clark said with an odd sense of finality. As if he knew it would be the last thing he'd say to her.

"No." She said with a bob of her head looking back at him, her stare fierce. "You didn't. And now? You wont be able to." She turned from him walking towards the shore line, she passed the mer but didn't send it another glance. At the dock, she turned towards Clark once more, her hair caught in the sea breeze, obscuring her face. "Goodbye, Clark."

Then she was gone.

For a while he didn't move. He was frozen in place. Or maybe time itself had stopped. Either or. No matter how much he tried to rationalise what had just happened, what he had done, he couldn't. He couldn't understand it; what he had seen, what he had heard.

Regret hit him in the gut not too long after, causing him to fall to the floor and stare into the sand as if it would hold the answers to the questions swirling around his mind. This was insane, he knew it was, and yet he couldn't seem to stop himself. He was on the train to nowhere and was now the only passenger, with Diana having just stepped off to never return.

No, he wasn't alone. Not truly. He looked up to the mer and felt his mind swing back and forward between the two truths he thought he knew. One, that mers were evil, and two, that this one wasn't.

He didn't know which was right. Didn't know if either of them were right. All he knew was that he had to be strong. He had to prove Diana wrong.

He slowly stood up and approached the mer, his stare firm as he pointed out to the water. "Get."

The mer didn't move and as Clark repeated himself, even batted its tail with a yawn.

Clark's jaw clenched, and without even meaning to, he kicked the dune by his feet hard enough to send flecks of sand all the way to the water. They also covered the mer, and as the sand settled he saw those wide eyes on him, panicked. "Yes, fucking be scared you piece of shit. Fuck off. Fuck off and leave me alone!" He kicked again, and more sand rained down.

He stopped looking at it. Stopped thinking about anything other than how the sand felt against his foot as he kicked it.

He’d created a ditch by the time he felt his anger abate. When he looked up, the mer was no longer there. The water in front of him rippled with movement as it swam away frantically.

“Good!” He cried out, falling to his knees. “Leave! Leave like everyone else! I don't need you, you, *you*-- ” he choked on the word.

Now time seemed to fly by as before he knew it, it was evening. The sun was gone and the wind grew cold.

Eventually he managed to stand. He hobbled to his shack and when he opened it, he saw the tub before him. His eyes watered. “*Fuck*.” He whispered.

He looked out to the ocean, hoping to see the mer watching him.

But it wasn’t there.

He was alone.

Chapter End Notes

:)

Ngl, was so tempted to just leave my end notes as a ':)' but you know me, I love to ramble ;D

I am sorry for doing this to ya'll, but Clark is a big dumb dumb and that ain't gonna change any time soon. At least Blue is healed up.... For now.

I debated uploading this chapter on Sunday, but I figured if I uploaded it today, I could then do the next chapter on Christmas! So that's what I'm gonna do! :D Until then, I wish you all well, and I hope you all enjoyed this chapter despite all the angst. Lemme know your thoughts!

;D xx

Chapter 9

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

April 29th 2016

I haven't seen the ~~th~~mer since Diana's visit. I think I actually scared it off for good this time. It's not keeping an eye on me from the water; not stalking me when I fish.

I don't know what to think about that.

April 30th 2016

I can't sleep.

May 3rd 2016

BIRTHDAY.

Diana didn't come.

May 10th 2016

~~*Everything's shit. The world is shit. Life is shit. Diana's a fucking bitch, fuck her and fuck the fucking mer. Fuck them both. They can fucking die.*~~

May 15th 2016

There was a tremor last night.

Not a big one; just a rumble, but fuck me I couldn't breath.

May 20th 2016

I don't know where the month went. I mean, I do, but I also don't.

I can't remember what I did. I know I did 'something' because I'm still alive, but the specifics of how I managed that are lost on me. When I look back at what I wrote, bits and pieces come back to me, but for the most part this last month has been a blur.

I also realise I need to clean the place or I will become sentient filth. I cleaned up a little bit already, scrubbed a shirt and some underwear to wear for now and I'm going to head to Cottonwood to clean the rest.

I don't want to, but I have to. Best case scenario; everything will be fine. Worst case scenario; i'm going to have to start going to Manton.

Turns out Clark wasn't prepared for the worst case scenario.

He should have known something like this was coming. The old saying about the calm before the storm existed for a reason. The trip over had been peaceful. There were a few mers swimming around on route, and as he got closer to Cottonwood he was surprised to see the lack of mers in the surrounding waters. He didn't know why that was the case until he parked up and stepped out onto the dock.

It was as he walked through the marina that his eyes caught something hanging from the archway that marked the entrance to the docks. At first he didn't know what he was looking at, but as he got closer he saw it for what it was. He paused, and realised he was no longer able to move.

He also knew he wasn't breathing. Knew he was holding his breath as though his mind was instead choosing to focus on what he was seeing rather than keep his lunging working.

It was a body. It was a mer's body. It wasn't *the* mer but that didn't stop Clark's mind from imagining it was.

He closed his eyes and told himself it was another mer; one with long blonde hair and a tail the colour of seaweed. There was no milky skin, or dark blue scales. *It was not the mer. Stop thinking it is.*

But it could be. It too could be hanging from an arch at this very moment. All because you scared it away.

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

When he opened his eyes he was greeted with the sight of the hanging mer as it actually appeared.

It was dead. That much was obvious. It’s intestines hung out of a slit in its belly, and even without that gruesome reminder, Clark could smell it from where he stood, staring up at it as it remained unmoving in the ocean breeze.

He heard footsteps come up from behind him, but Clark didn't turn to look at their source. He knew it was Porter, and when he broke his stare away he saw the man in question next to him, looking up to him with that same nervous expression he wore the last time they met. “Clark. I see you’re looking at the--” Porter daultered, looking away. “Thing.” He finished quietly.

“I am.” Clark said, surprised that his voice sounded halfway normal. He looked back at it, suddenly unable to tear his eyes away from it’s delicate face. “Why is it here?”

“She--” but Porter cut himself off with a start. “ *It* ,” he amended, “killed Tom.”

“Tom?” Clark asked, his brow quirking.

“Tom Albernathy. He runs-- *ran* the ranch here.” Porter looked away, rubbing his hand on his neck. “It killed him.” He repeated, like an afterthought.

Clark wondered why he knew that name. Wondered why he was surprised when he heard it. When those answers came to him, his stomach churned to the point he could feel bile rising in his throat. He took a deep breath, urging away the nausea. “I see.”

Porter didn't walk away, remaining next Clark as he tried and failed to regain his composure. Eventually Porter placed a hand on Clark’s back; an oddly reassuring gesture that shouldn’t have comforted Clark as much as it did. When Clark turned to him, that nervous frown was gone, replaced with a look of steely determination that Clark couldn’t place the source of. His mouth opened as though about to speak, but they were were interrupted by the sound of footsteps. Porter took a quick glace towards them and stepped away from Clark, walking swiftly back to the shipping office without a backwards glance.

Clark would have followed had it not been for his name being called. “Kent!” He heard, and when he turned to the source he had to fight his grimace.

“Antonio.” Clark ground out. He hoped he put the right amount of vitriol into the word. Enough to get Antonio to turn right back around.

He did not, apparently. Antonio all but swaggered up to the hanging body, grinning as he came to a stop underneath it. Clark fought back another wave of bile. Antonio cocked his head as he looked Clark up and down. “I have to admit I didn't think you’d come back here after what happened but I’m happy to see you have.”

“You are?” Clark said, raising a brow.

“Of course I am!” Antonio said, and despite the earnest smile on his face Clark could feel the hatred behind it. Could see it glimmer like flames in his eyes. “If you hadn't, you wouldn't have seen our new art piece. Hung it up yesterday myself.” He gestured to the hanging body and winked at him. “Works like a charm at keeping mers away.”

“Right.” Clark said flatly.

Clark half expected him to walk away then, but somehow he knew Antonio wasn't one to quit whilst he was ahead. “Speaking of mers,” he said with a wiggle of his brows. “How’s your one doing?”

“It's fine.” Clark said simply, reveling at the look of surprise on Antonio's face. “Oh, did you want me to say it died from the harpoon wound?” He crossed his arms. “‘Cause it didn't.” Of course he had no way of knowing if that was still the case. But that didn't matter. It had stopped spying on Clark, so as far as he was concerned, the mer was out of his life for good. Which he had to remind himself was a good thing.

“Oh well.” Antonio shrugged. “There is always next time.”

Clark's frown grew as he opened his mouth to retort, but Antonio stopped him, holding up his hand. “Don't worry, Kent. I’m not one to get between a freak and his mer unless I have to.” He then let out a breath, a look of faux sadness on his face. “But I don't know about everyone else on the island. Some of them were pretty disgusted by what I told them you did.”

Okay, so this is the worst case scenario times a hundred. His mind supplied as he stared at Antonio’s face, fighting the urge to punch it. He instead shrugged, forcing himself to keep his expression neutral. “If they're as chicken shit as you, I don't really have much to worry about.”

Clark fought back the smile as Antonio's expression soured. "Good one, Kent." He gave a pinched smile. "I would say i'll be seeing you, but after today, who knows if that will be true."

He didn't get a chance to respond, not that he wanted to. Antonio marched his way off the dock, leaving Clark to once again look at the hanging body. He sent a cursory look to the shipping office and didn't miss Porter watching him through the window. He debated walking in there, but after a few more moments of uncertainty he chose instead to get this whole trip over with and head to the laundrette.

It wasn't lost on him that people were staring as he passed. More so than they usually would. He really had to wonder what Antonio and the others had been saying about the 'incident' as he couldn't understand how stopping a murder could put him on so many peoples shit list.

~~*But that's not all that you did, is it?*~~ Clark frowned at the voice, trying to block it out. ~~*It's not exactly lies they're spreading. You've thought about the thing nearly everyday now. Face it, you've been sucked in. There is no hope for you.*~~

Not. Now.

When he got to the laundrette, he was able to wash his clothes with only minimal staring. He told himself it was from the smell and after convincing himself of that, it made the hour spent sitting inside easier to bare. He contemplated going for a walk whilst he waited to try and pass the time, but something about the expression on the owner's face told him if he left the place, he'd be at risk at finding his clothes in the ocean when he returned.

The wait wasn't too bad in the end. Living on an island with little to do made him a pro at zoning out. It wasn't long before he heard the washer beep and once everything was clean, he made his way back outside.

He thought about leaving then. After all, he had done what he had set out to do.

But he did need supplies.

Lucy’s was quiet when he stepped inside. The girl at the register sent him a look and on the plus side, it was nothing like the stink eyes he was receiving from everyone else. She hopped off the seat and stepped behind the curtain before Clark had even said a word, and not even a moment later Lucy's head was poking out instead. “Clark!” She said brightly, and Clark didn't even realise he was holding his breath until he heard her say his name; her expression void of any ill will. “Gosh, I thought you’d dropped off the face of the Earth.” She sent him a smile. “How you been?”

“Good.” He said, despite the fact that good and all of its synonyms were it no way indicative of how he felt, somehow Lucy's smile was enough to change all that. “How about you? Have things been okay here?”

“Well, that depends...” Lucy sighed as she sat on the stool by the register. “I take it you saw Antonio’s ‘work’ when you came in?”

“I did.” Clark said, with a single nod. “It’s quite the statement.”

“That's one way of putting it.” Lucy said, crossing her arms. “I would have used ‘eyesore’ or ‘monstrosity’ myself.”

“Right.” Clark said, his lips quirking downwards.

Lucy must have caught his expression and went on. “Personally, I don’t care if she ripped Tom’s head off. She didn't deserve to be gutted and hung out like that. At the end of the day, Tom was a grown man and put her in that shed. He should have known something like this might happen… It’s like getting mad at a lion for biting a gazelle.”

“Oh." Clark let out. “I didn't think you were…”

Lucy only sent him a look. “I don't need to be fucking a mer to feel empathy for them.”

Clark’s eyes widened. “Right, that's what I--”

“I know.” Lucy said, raising a brow. “Believe me, the boys told me all about you rescuing your mer.

They embellished it a whole lot, but if I had to guess it actually went something like; they found him, you told them to let him go, Antonio stabbed him and then they all got mad when you saved it."

"That is pretty much the gist of it, yeah." Clark said, pressing his lips together.

"Some people don't see mers as people." Lucy muttered as she turned her pensive stare upwards. "I do. I know to some that makes me an idiot, but at the end of the day I look at their eyes and I see intelligence, I see humanity."

"Even after everything they've done?" Clark asked, frowning.

"After what they've done? Clark, look at what *we* do." Lucy said, gesturing towards where they knew the marina lay. "We've started wars; wiped out civilizations and other humans for what they believe, and then you get shit heads like Antonio who think that just 'cause they got two legs, they somehow have the moral high ground over the mers." She sighed, shaking her head. "They way I see it, they do what they need to do to survive, just like we do."

"Huh…" Clark said to himself as he pondered those words.

At his silence, Lucy cleared her throat. "Anyway, I know what I said is a little… *divisive* . So, if you could not let the rest of the island know what I told you, I'd appreciate it..." Lucy said, looking away. "As you've seen for yourself, not everyone thinks like we do."

"Of course, Lucy." Clark said, stepping up close to the counter. "I mean, it's not like I *could* talk to anyone else... Everyone hates me."

"Not everyone." Lucy said, with a sympathetic smile. "I still owe you a discount for life, remember?"

Clark sent a smile back. "I thought it was for a month tops?"

"What can I say, i'm feeling generous today." She stood up, clapping her hands together. "Now, what are you getting?"

He ended up spending all the money he'd acquired from Lucy last time. He didn't intend to stock up as much as he did, but given the temperament of Cottonwood, he figured it would be best to keep his visits infrequent from now on, or at least until people had forgotten what he had done.

But that might take years for that to happen in the case of Antonio, Steve and Colin, and, as he learned upon walking back to his boat, Sal.

He paused outside the mechanics, and caught sight of Marcos and Sal behind the counter within. He waved when he noticed Marcos' eyes were on him. He raised his own hand as though to wave back, but as he did, another hand darted out and stopped it from moving. Clark saw Sal's stare on him, his face like thunder as he stepped out from behind the counter and marched out of the doorway. "What the Hell do you think you're doing?"

"Waving." Clark said, blandly. "Am I not allowed to wave?"

"Not to my son you're not, you freak." Sal spat out, crossing his arms.

"Right, i'm a freak." Clark said, nodding slowly. "And you? You're an asshole. See? I can do it too."

"Why don't you just fuck off back to your island? We don't want you here, or are you too much of freak to see that?"

"Oh no, I got that message very clearly."

"Dad, come on." Marcos said, appearing behind his father in the doorway, his face drawn. "Leave Clark alone, he isn't hurting anyone."

"No, he isn't." Sal conceded, his lips quirking upwards. "But his mer will. Yes, one day Kent, that mer of yours is going to kill you, just like Tom's killed him and when that happens, you'll realise we were right about those things."

Marcos' mouth opened as though to argue, but Sal only turned to him and with a few scant words in Spanish, he turned to Clark, his eyes watering. "You should leave, Clark."

"Right." Clark said, feeling the full weight of those words. "I'll see you around…" He continued, but Marcos looked away. "Or not." He added with a grimace.

Clark left the two and walked the rest of the way towards the docks, keeping his eyes firmly on the ground as he passed the body on the archway. He set his hamper of clean clothes and shopping inside the cabin and went to pull out of the marina.

He cast another look towards the island, and when he caught sight of the mer this time, he took a deep breath and steeled himself.

He knew what he had to do.

Chapter End Notes

:)

Merry Christmas everyone!! I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. I know these is no Blue, but he's fine, don't worry ;)

Also, as I was finishing up this chapter I was reminded of how angsty this whole fic is. I really am just going hard on the angst. I promise at some point there will be fluff and cuteness but we have to get through all the pain and first.

The mystery around Cottonwood thickens, tune in next time to see what Clark will do.

Also thank you for all your kind words! Your comments are what keep me going. I hope today is filled with joy and love for all of you. Until next time xx

Chapter 10

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

May 20th 2016

Cont'd,

So it turns out the worst case scenario was worse than I thought.

The jokes on those shit heads, though. I'm about to get rid of their prized 'art' piece.

At night, the waters were even quieter.

Clark kept expecting a mer to appear as he headed to Cottonwood, but as he looked out across the surf, he saw nary a fin or a face.

At first he didn't know why he was looking so intently for one. It took a little while for the reason to come to him. He wanted to see the mer as he searched the waves; if not simply to allow himself to continue believing it really was okay out there.

When he had returned home that morning, he wanted to see it waiting near his island. All throughout the day, he wanted to see it watching him from the water, and now, more than ever, he wanted to see it somewhere in the vast waters of the ocean.

He tried to discern why. The longer he thought, the more a nagging weight in his chest began apparent. Clark could only somewhat identify it; guilt. All the other emotions bundled up there with it were a mystery for now, so in Clark's mind it must have been that sole identifiable emotion that guided him right now and not one of the many others.

But why guilt? Was it from kicking the mer off his island? It had been a month since it happened. He thought he was over it. So why was he feeling guilty once more?

You know why. His mind supplied as his boat pressed onwards. Clark steeled himself as it went on. *It could be dead somewhere. Maybe it's hanging up from an archway, too. Guts out and everything. All because of you.*

Despite his best efforts to push those thoughts aside they still plagued him by the time he pulled into Cottonwood.

He debated parking up in his usual spot, but at the last minute changed course towards the deserted end of the marina. As he stepped off the boat, all the lights were off and in the low light Clark knew it would be difficult for anyone, much less a human, to make him out. Clark on the other hand, could clearly see the body hanging from the archway before him as though it were day. He was the only one out here and he made his way slowly towards it, before his attention was drawn towards the shipping office.

He'd heard something from within, and when he focused he saw Porter inside, slumped on one of the desks. He looked to be asleep, and the noise Clark must have heard was nothing more than a heavy sigh. Clark debated leaving him alone, and doing what he had come here to do, but a suspicion he held within himself had his feet moving towards the building and after finding the front door open, stepping inside.

Porter was in the back office. The door to it was closed, and Clark eased it open and peered within. The space was modest, with little more than a desk and a few filing cabinets. The light above was a simple bulb on a cord, and when Clark stepped inside, and shut the door behind him, he reached for the switch and flipped on said light.

Porter's head darted up and Clark didn't miss the panic there before it quickly abated. "Clark? Wha-- What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same." Clark said, leaning against the door. "A little late for you to be at the office, don't you think?"

“Right, I--” Porter cleared his throat. “I must have lost track of time.”

“Expecting another midnight shipment, are we?” Clark asked, his eyes narrowing.

“What?” Porter blurted. “No, no. Nothing like that.”

“Then why are you here?” Clark asked, coming forward until he stood just before the desk, looming over it. “You know how this looks, right? Staying here till midnight, all alone, keeping the doors open as though you’re expecting someone. So, I’ll ask again. What are you doing here?”

“I--” Porter's eyes filled with tears as he looked away. “I didn't want to go home...”

Clark wasn’t satisfied. He crossed his arms. “Why?”

Clark could see the indecision on Porter’s face, could see that he wanted nothing more than to run, but something stopped him; perhaps it was knowing he was well and truly caught or perhaps it was another reason entirely that caused his mouth to fall open and for the words to pour out.

Porter let out a shaky breath. “Yana is there.” He whispered, bringing his hands to his eyes and curling them tightly against his sockets. “She’ll want to know what happened to Elyss and I can’t tell her what they did to her. I just *can’t*.”

Clark frowned. “Who is Yana?”

“Yana, my partner.” Porter muttered before looking up at him, his eyes red. “My… *mer* … partner.”

“Your…” but Clark didn't continue, his mouth snapping shut as realisation hit. “Oh.”

“You look surprised.” Porter ended up saying.

“I just didn’t think you were…” Clark looked away. “A... you know…”

Porter gave a single huff of a laugh. “Well, I didn’t think you were one, either.”

“I'm not.” Clark said sharply. “I just--” but when he tried to come up with the end of that sentence, nothing came. He shook his head as he kept his stare on the floor, hoping the flush across his face wasn’t noticeable.

Porter didn’t comment if it was, he simply sent Clark a shy smile. “I get it.” He said. “It’s okay, Clark. I’m not judging you. It’s not like we set out to love mers. It’s more like they wiggle their way into our lives and at first you don’t even know what it is you’re feeling, you just know that you care about them, and they care about you. Then before you know it you’ll do anything to keep them safe and after that-- it’s love.”

“Yeah, well mine left me, so--” Clark muttered, and it was only as he heard what he’d said that he sputtered. “Not that I *have* a mer, it's just, what I meant to say--” He cut himself off before huffing. “I’m *not* a merner.”

Porter held up a hand, as though to placate him. “Clark, you really don't have to justify yourself to me. It’s okay. I get it.”

“No, you don’t understand, I'm not--” Clark ground his teeth. “I don't *love* that mer, okay?”

“Okay.” Porter said softly.

Clark eyed him. “I mean it.”

Porter only looked at him and the silence that followed was almost enough to get Clark to speak, if only to fill it, but he didn’t know what to say, didn’t know how best to navigate the maze he had just constructed for himself. He didn’t even understand *what* he was saying, much less why. He thought he knew what he felt, and yet when he tried to voice it he was left speechless.

Eventually it was Porter who spoke, ending the silence Clark was quickly growing to hate. He stood up and slowly made his way over to the window, peering out of it. “I will say, you still haven’t answered my question. Why are *you* here, Clark?”

Clark was thankful at least for the change of subject. It did something to loosen the tension he was feeling. He contemplated lying but figured it was only fair to answer truthfully. “The mer out there. I was going to get it down."

He’d expected Porter to look grateful, but his expression only became more pained. “Please, don't call her ‘it’.” He looked away, shaking his head. “I can only handle it so much...”

Clark kept his eyes on Porter. “But they’re not--”

He didn’t get a chance to finish as Porter whirled on him. “I mean it. If you finish that sentence, I will smack you.” Porter ground out, his eyes like daggers. “I don't know about *your* mer, but Elyss *was* a woman, Yana *is* a woman, they are not ‘*its* ’ or ‘*things* ’. Understand?”

Clark debated whether he should push the matter, but one look at Porter told him he’d simply be kicking a broken man whilst he was down, he instead took a breath. “I was going to get... *her* down.” He amended.

That did something to calm the fire in Porter's eyes as he looked at Clark, his eyes curious. “Why?”

Clark contemplated the question. Even though it was only a single word, it had Clark silent for a good minute as he poured it over. He honestly didn’t know the answer. All he knew was that he had to do this. Knew it most likely had to do with that awful bundle of emotions he could feel festering inside of himself. The more he had dwelled on it, the more his resolve strengthened. He had to get the mer down and yet the actual reason why still eluded him. Eventually his mouth fell open and a single word left him in response. "Guilt." He ended up saying.

"What?” Porter asked, his eyes blowing wide. “Why would you be guilty? You haven't done anything."

Maybe not directly. His mind supplied, and in one painful instance, the festering grew even more intense. Clark closed his eyes and tried to urge the feeling away and when he opened them once more, he saw Porter's expectant eyes still on him. Clark simply looked away. He couldn't answer that question; not without explaining everything.

He didn't want to admit that the guilt he felt was less from this mers death and more from his consciousness as a whole; from what he did to the mer, to Diana. As much as he liked to deny it, pretty much all of Clark's life was now dictated by some form of guilt and this mer was simply another weight now living on Clark's shoulders along with the others.

He did concede he had to say something, so with a mirthless laugh, he spoke. "Beats me."

Porter didn't look satisfied with that answer, but knew better than to push it. He simply went back to his desk and sat down. "Well, I appreciate the gesture either way. I would have gotten her down myself, but I know Antonio is waiting for that."

At the mention of his name, Clark couldn't help but frown. "Right. I can imagine he'd be pissed with anyone tampering with his 'display.'"

"I suppose that's part of the reason…" Porter said, crossing his arms. "But it also has to do with the fact he hates me."

"Why would he hate you?" Clark asked. "I thought he just hated me."

"No, no." Porter pressed his lips together. "He hates me, too."

Clark frowned as he tried to discern why. He raised a brow as a thought came to him. "Did he find out about the Sacramento shipment?"

That triggered something Clark wasn't expecting; Porter laughed. It was bitter and sharp and when Clark saw the smile on his face, he could feel the pure vitriol behind it. "Who do you think got me to do it?"

Clark paused, his skepticism evident though not fully realised. "Why would he have wanted you to do it?"

“Lets see…” Porter brought his hand to his mouth, tapping his index finger along his bottom lip as he thought. “He knows about Yana, knew about Elyss, and after Colin’s boat was totaled he didn’t want to go up to Redding to get supplies anymore. So he came to me, asking about getting access to the Sacramento shipment so that he’d be fine when the food shortages started. I told them to piss off, but of course, he just gave me one of his shit eating grins and asked how Yana would feel about me turning them down.” Porter let out a long breath. “In the end, I caved. Did what they wanted. It ate me away knowing that everyone suffered because of me, but I had to do it.”

Clark pursed his lips, leaning against the wall. “‘They?’ You mean it wasn’t just Antonio?”

“Colin and Steve were in on it, too.” Porter nodded. “Antonio was the ringleader, sure, but they had no qualms about screwing over the island so long as they got their share. The three of them were here at midnight to get the shipment when it came in. I just oversaw it all, and made sure the Redding folks dropping it off didn’t think anything weird was going on.”

“So no one else knows?”

“No. I know Salvator was suspicious when he saw the three of them weren’t struggling like the rest of us were, but in the end he didn’t suspect any foul play, just thought that they were better prepared for food shortages, which technically isn’t wrong." Porter shook his head. "To this day I think he still believes that the shipment went missing. I’m sure if he heard otherwise though, he’d be furious.”

“So why not tell him? Hell, why not tell the whole island what they shitheads did. I’m sure they’d listen to you over Antonio.”

“I told you.” Porter sighed. “They’d come for Yana. They’d *kill* her. Just like they killed Elyss.”

“Not to play devil's advocate here, but Elyss killed Tom, so it’s not like her death wasn’t justified.”

Porter's expression darkened. “If you really think she killed Tom, you’re a bigger idiot than I thought.”

Clark raised a brow. “How do you know that?”

“I just do!” Porter snapped. “I wasn’t there, sure. Yes, Antonio and the boys may *say* she killed Tom but it just isn’t the truth. Think about it, they happen to show up at his farm *just* as she’s killing him? They’d been together for over a year, and she *never* showed any signs she was unhappy but she just so happens to ‘snap’ when the boys show up? Also, if she was feeling threatened, why would she attack Tom when I know for damn sure he would have been doing everything to try and keep her safe from them? Nothing adds up with their story. They’re lying. I know they are.”

“So, what? You think *they* killed Tom?” Clark frowned. “That’s a Hell of an accusation to be making.”

“Well, it’s not without reason.” Porter said sharply, before the fire in his voice lessened. “But you’re right. I know what I’m accusing them of, and I know it makes me sound crazy, but I know I’m right.”

“Well, if you were, there would be evidence to support your theory. It's a hard thing to mimic, for one. Mer attack victims tend to look--” As Clark said the words, his mind filled with images that he quickly shook his head to be rid of them. He swallowed thickly. "... a certain way."

Porter laughed again. “That's the best part, Clark. There was no investigation; no autopsy.”

Clark’s mouth fell open, before he managed to close it again. “What?”

“Oh, did I not mention Antonio is married to the chief of police?” Porter pursed his lips. “Carla’s not exactly going to run an investigation that might implicate her husband, and she’s definitely going to take his word when he tells her it was a mer attack, so no need for an autopsy.”

Clark grimaced, and without even realising it he felt himself slump down the wall. “God, this island is a real shit show.” He muttered to himself. *Maybe it would be better if I started going to Manton.*

“You’re telling me.” Porter said, shaking his head. “This whole place; it’s like a bag of candy and arsenic. Some people are fine, wonderful even, but you get ones like Antonio that make you live in fear that any day will be your last.” He looked out the window again. “It’s not a coincidence he hung her up in the marina. It’s a warning. He’s letting me know that if I don’t do what he wants, next time, it will be Yana hanging up from there.”

“That’s where I come in.” Clark said. “He already hates me, so it’s no skin off my nose to piss him off a little more, and it’s not like I have to worry about him hurting me or my--” He cleared his throat, “*the* mer.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that.” Porter winced. “I know you’re off on your own island, but if Antonio gets riled he can be ruthless.”

“I can be pretty ruthless myself.” Clark said, his expression carefully blank.

It was then that Clark heard something; the sound of quiet footsteps. He turned and faced the wall, peering through it and saw someone by the hanging mer. “Someones in the marina.”

“*Shit* .” Porter said, rushing from his seat to peer out the window, keeping himself low. “I bet its Antonio, he’s going to do something to her and--”

“No, no.” Clark said, placating Porter with a gentle hand on his shoulder. “It's Marcos.”

“Marcos?” Porter asked, his confusion evident. “Why on Earth would he be--”

“He brought a ladder.” He watched as Marcos climbed it, and pulled something from his waistband. “He's trying to cut the rope.” Clark added, before turning his attention to Porter. “I’m going to talk to him.”

Porter’s eyes blew wide. “Don't tell him I'm here!” He said, already darting completely out of the view of the window. “He might tell Salvator, and then he might tell--”

“Don't worry.” Clark said, waving him off. “I’ve got this.”

Clark stepped out of the shipping office, and hovered the short distance over to where Marcos stood by the mer. He had brought a ladder, and was trying his best to cut the rope whilst still keeping his

stare out towards where the town lay. Clark could hear his heart hammering in his chest as he floated up to him. He drifted into his peripheral vision. “Hey.”

Marcos’ whirled on him, and before he could slip off the ladder, Clark was there holding him steady. "Jesus!" Marcos yelped, dropping the knife. It clattered to the ground.

Clark for the most part kept his face neutral as he waited. Though he wasn't sure what he was waiting for. Whether it was for Marcos to push him away or for him to head down the ladder and pick the knife right back up and continue with what he had been doing. He hoped for the latter. "Are you getting it down?" He asked, despite knowing the answer already.

"*Shush!* " Marcos whispered, fear entering his eyes as he looked around. “Someone might hear you.”

"We’re alone." Clark said, keeping his voice the same.

"But--"

Clark didn't bother explaining himself further as he let go of the boy. He took the rope in his hands and pulled it in two where Marcos had already started cutting. The body fell to the ground. Rigor mortis had set in and her body collided against the dock with a loud thump.

Marcos winced at the sound, looking away and closing his eyes. Clark however couldn't place quiet why he didn’t; his eyes never leaving her body as he drifted down to the ground beside her. Face down, she didn't look dead, the skin of her back looked fine, her tail as well. Some part of Clark wanted to believe that if he put her back in the water, she would even start to swim.

But he knew that wouldn’t happen.

"What were you going to do with it?" Clark asked, not looking up from the mermaid.

"I was just gonna put her in the water, " Marcos said quietly, slowly coming down from the ladder. “Mr. Abernathy wouldn’t have wanted this for her."

"Where was he buried?" Clark asked. There wasn't much free land going on the island, and a graveyard was space that could be better used to help the living rather than house the dead. Most islands didn't even bother with them.

"He wasn't." Marcos said with a shake of the head. "He was cremated."

"Right. So where are his ashes?"

"He wanted them scattered into the ocean." He crossed his arms. "My dad took him out a few days ago and did it."

Clark gave a nod. "So we'll keep them together." He said firmly as he reached forward and scooped the mermaid into his arms. She was soft to the touch, and as he turned her back around to face him, he was confronted with those gentle features again, the softness in her face. She was beautiful and Clark couldn't help but look away.

As he walked back towards his boat, he heard footsteps following him. "Why are you doing this?" Marcos called out. He didn't hesitate as he stepped onto the boat after Clark.

"To piss off Antonio." Clark said, as he set the mer down on the floor.

"Antonio?" Marcos asked, his confusion evident only to be washed away by a look of understanding. "Is this 'cause of what he's been saying about you?"

"That and he's a prick." Clark muttered as he started the engine and pulled out of the marina.

Marcos didn't say anything to that, keeping quiet now that the boat began to move. He would still send furtive glances towards the docks, but when no movement was spotted he seemed to relax, and sat on the sofa as Clark piloted the boat out into open water.

He didn't mean to, but he ended up taking them to his usual fishing spot. It was a good distance from Cottonwood, and it being so late he knew they weren't going to be interrupted. He brought the boat to

a stop, and without a word picked the mer up once more, walking out to the swimming platform and crouching down at its edge.

Setting his arms into the water, he lowered them until the mers buoyancy took over, allowing her to drift from the boat.

Clark didn’t go back inside, didn't plan on going anywhere for a while. He pulled off his shoes and set his feet into the water. It was cold, but he didn’t mind it.

Marcos joined him a few minutes later, sitting down beside Clark. He pulled his knees up to his chest and hugged them, watching the same patch of water Clark was. Perhaps he was hoping for the same miracle to occur, or maybe he was simply lost in the flow of the waves as well as the mermaid laying amongst them. Facing up to the sky, her eyes closed in endless sleep; she looked at peace and Clark felt his stomach wriggle the longer he looked, so instead he focused on his hands.

Marcos finally opened his mouth. “So you were gonna get her down, too?”

“Yup.” Clark said, staring at the lines across his palm. “Why were you doing it?”

“I told you. Mr. Abernathy wouldn’t want this for her. I *knew* him, and I know that even if she did kill him, he would be beside himself if he knew she was hanging up somewhere. At least this way, like you said…” he turned to Clark, his eyes misting over. “They’re together.”

Clark gave a solemn nod, and met Marcos’ stare. He didn’t know why he felt the need, but as he sat he felt a question rise up in his mind. “You think she killed him?”

Surprisingly, Marcos didn’t answer straight away, pausing to think. He turned to Clark fully, putting his knees down as he sighed. “Honestly? No. No I don’t.”

“Why?” Clark asked, his voice purposefully flat.

Marcos looked to be contemplating that answer before he sighed. “It’s a lot to get into…” he said, shaking his head. “It would mean me getting into all of our islands BS.”

“I mean…” Clark pursed his lips. “We have time if you did want to.”

“We really don’t.” Marcos said, standing up then. “In fact, we better head back soon before my dad realises I'm not home in bed right now.”

“Right.” Clark said, pulling his feet out of the water and standing up to join him. As he did, he noticed movement in the waves. He could have sworn his heart stopped. For a single moment he thought he saw her move, but no, it wasn’t her.

It was another mer.

Clark was about to yell, to perhaps even throw something into the water to try and dissuade the scavenger, but when he saw a familiar head poke up from the water, all thoughts of yelling were quickly gone, and Clark's mouth bobbed open instead.

The mer was beside the other, it’s hand trailing along her neck down to the slit in her stomach. It gave a quiet chip. It leant in close to her neck, and as it did Clark was finally able to shout. “Hey! Don’t you dare eat--”

But the mer simply glared at him, not moving away. It pulled in close to her neck and bit down on her throat. In the same movement, it slid one of its long claws deep between her ribs.

Once it pulled back, air hissed out from her neck and chest, and slowly, her body sank lower and lower into the water, until all that remained to suggest she had been there was a faint ripple. That and the mer floating in the water beside it.

Clark opened his mouth, trying to urge any words out, but the mer only looked at him, a faint growl coming from its mouth.

“I--” but Clark didn’t get a chance to finish that sentence, as the mer slipped back into the water. “Wait!” Clark yelled, hoping it would hear him, but the mer was gone. Swimming down into the

water beside the slowly descending body. Clark swallowed thickly and wiped his face. *It's okay, at least.* He thought to himself. *It's not hanging up somewhere.* ~~*It definitely hates you, though.*~~

"Trouble in paradise?"

Clark was startled by the voice and turned wildly towards Marcos, who was watching him with a grim smile. "Your mer." He added, tilting his head towards the water it had just been. "Looks like it was mad at you."

"Yeah, I--" Clark turned to the water too, hoping if he looked long enough it would reappear. It did not. "I kind of fucked up."

"Well, it can't have been that bad." Marcos said, walking up the steps from the platform, back inside the boat. "I mean, it didn't try to pull you into the water just now, so it can't be *that* mad."

Clark nodded absent mindedly. "Right, it..." But his mind snapped back to reality and he trailed off, looking down at his damp feet. "It didn't try to pull me in..." He muttered to himself.

Marcos was already inside, starting the boat and pulling away. Clark remained rooted where he stood.

It doesn't mean anything. He told himself, but another part of him-- a part Clark had been spending quite a lot of time squashing down-- wondered if that really was true. If the mer really did want him dead, then *that* would have been the perfect opportunity to potentially cause it. They were out in open water, in the dead of night, with the only other person out here with him being Marcos, who, let's face it, wouldn't have been able to do much should Clark get dragged in.

So… It doesn't want me dead? Clark ended up thinking to himself. Maybe it was just a coincidence, maybe it meant nothing, and yet even as he went to join Marcos inside the cabin, he dwelled on it.

He found him in front of the wheel, trailing his finger along the map on the console beside it. When he felt Clark's presence, he turned to him, his finger immediately going towards the red 'x' that marked a lonesome island nearby. "Is that where you live?" He asked.

Clark only nodded, still not trusting himself to speak.

Marcos himself didn't push for more, turning back towards the wheel and changing the course by a fraction as he turned his attention back to the map. “Maybe one day I can come visit you there,” he said, with a small shrug. “You know, if you ever wanted to hang out.”

Clark felt himself frown at the words, before he realised that he didn’t actually mind that idea as much as he thought he would. He came up close to Marcos and eased him aside as he took over steering, he caught his eye and sent him a nod. “Sure. Just don’t complain about how I live and we will be fine.”

Marcos smiled at that, and bumped his shoulder. “You should see my room, my dad tells me he’s gonna send me to a farm if I insist on living like a pig.”

They spoke intermittently on their journey back to Cottonwood, and when Clark pulled into the marina, Marcos hopped off before the boat even came to a complete stop. He turned to Clark and whispered. “Okay, I better head back, you take care now, Clark.”

“You too, Marcos.” He sent a nod. “See you around.”

By the time he got back to his island, sleep was all he could focus on. So much so that he walked from his boat to his bed in a haze. He fell against it without even bothering to undress, and the moment he felt his face in the pillow, he was asleep.

The mer in the water watched him for a little while longer before ducking back down into the waves.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Years eve to all! I debated posting this tomorrow instead, but I'm working then and I figured one last update before the New Year was just as good as one on the 1st :D

But yes, for this chapter, the mystery around Cottonwood grows, Clark realises (partially) that he was an asshole, and Blue may not have forgiven him 'just' yet, but hey, he's back to stalking which lets be real means he won't be mad for too much longer ;)

As always let me know your thoughts, reading your theories just makes me so happy, and I will see you all in the New Year! Fingers crossed its better than 2020! XD

Take care x

Chapter 11

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

May 22nd 2016

I saw the mer today. It was as I was watering the flowers; I could see it in the shallows on the other side of the island, but when I tried to approach it, it ducked back down and swam away.

I guess it's something. ~~He's~~ It's still pissed, but at least it's coming near the island again.

I just don't know how to fix things. I mean, if it doesn't stick around long enough to listen to me, It's not like I can just yell 'I'm sorry' at the water, right?

... Unless?

May 23rd 2016

Tried it. Didn't work.

May 24th 2016

Okay, I have a better idea.

I figure if I lure it to the surface somehow; it will stay out long enough for me to at least try and apologize, and if that doesn't work then, hey, as far as I'm concerned I did all I could and the mer should be thankful I even tried.

I won't lie, I'm being selfish here. Yes, I'm guilty about what I did, but it's what that guilt is causing that I want to deal with. I haven't slept properly for a while now and I'm just hoping apologizing to the mer will fix that.

I never thought I'd ever miss the ocean dream, but when the alternative is seeing the mer hanging up dead, turns out I'd rather be in the water.

Even if it means apologizing to a ~~stupid~~ fish ~~thing~~ .

May 27th 2016

~~*Alright. Today is the day. Operation forgiveness is a go.*~~

~~*I can't believe I fucking wrote that. You know what, no entry for today.*~~

It started with a trip to Sacramento.

It had to be Sacramento as they were the only place Clark knew would sell what he was after. Well, Cottonwood might, but for a much higher markup, and with what he had done there only a week prior most likely still being a hot topic on the island, he didn't want to return and stoke the ire of the place any further.

He was fairly certain Antonio knew it was him who took the mer. Clark doubted there were many other suspects. Porter wouldn't say anything to the contrary lest confirm he had been at the marina all night, and Marcos wasn't about to confess his own involvement in the affair and risk his father finding out.

After saving the mer from Antonio and Co's ire, Clark wouldn't put it past Antonio to put two and two together and achieve the very correct answer that he was the one to blame. He only hoped by the time he did go back to Cottonwood, there wouldn't be another mer hanging up there instead.

That was his current fear. Whether it be the mer or Yana, or Hell, another mer entirely, Clark worried that soon Antonio would decide that a new art piece was needed in the marina, and Clark wouldn't be there to stop him.

Shaking that thought from his head, he stepped off his boat onto the Sacramento marina. He had chosen the Southern port as the North was for commercial usage, but even so, the place was jam packed. After looking around at the multitude of boats he felt his heart begin to hammer. He couldn't remember the last time he visited a city this big. Couldn't remember a time he saw so many people in one place.

Yes you can. His mind supplied as he walked along the dock.

He let out a shallow breath. Despite how much he tried to tell himself it wasn't the case, he knew exactly why he never visited Sacramento before this. Why didn't he go to any of the larger islands nearby. They reminded him of Metropolis. In fact, they did more than remind him. There was an eerie similarity that all large islands now held in his mind, and being on one only had his mind confusing the present and the past. The world around him seemed to shift, morph from one image to another. He kept his stare on the floor to try and ground himself. *This isn't Metropolis. Metropolis is gone.*

He just had to buy what he needed and leave before he lost his nerve. It was as he made his way along the dock, eyes cast downwards, that he bumped shoulders with a man. Before he could mumble an apology and be on his way he heard something. "Clark?"

Clark stilled, his palms growing clammy in an instant. He tried to analyse the voice he was hearing to determine if he should keep walking or even run, but it wasn't one he knew immediately, so with great hesitation he turned and saw a man he vaguely recognized.

"It was Clark, wasn't it?" The man asked, readjusting his glasses as he eyed Clark up and down.

“Uh.” Clark said, frowning as he tried to place the man. He really couldn’t. “Sorry, have we met?”

The man’s eyes blew wide. “Oh, forgive me. We did only meet once prior.” He held out his hand, and with some reluctance Clark took it. “Dr. Hadal, but please, call me Elijah, or Eli. I’m not too fussy.”

“Oh.” Recognition hit Clark, and he nodded. “Right, the marine biologist?”

“Yes!” Elijah said with a grin. “It’s good to see you again, I believe it’s been…” he paused and brought his finger to his lips, tapping it. “Well, a long time.” He ended up saying with a half shrug.

“Yeah.” Clark agreed, pursing his lips. “How have you been?”

“Good!” Elijah nodded. “Very good. I was actually on my way to Cottonwood. Just stopped here for a quick refuel. They have a mer there for me, you see.”

Clark didn’t think it was possible for his heart to stop and yet as the seconds ticked by he could have sworn he didn’t feel it pump once. “Do they now?” He ended up asking, despite how the words felt like shards glass as they came out of his mouth.

“Yes, yes.” Elijah said as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. “My contact faxed this to me, said she’s ready to be collected.”

She. Clark felt the weight slide of his shoulders, before it went right back again. *She. Porter.* He snatched the paper from Elijah and ignored his half-hearted complaints as he read through it.

19th of May 2016

Hey, fish guy. Found a mer, she's hanging in the marina. You can come get her if you want, just leave payment in the usual spot.

A.

"Oh." Clark let out, his relief palpable. It's not the mer. *It's not Yana either*. He took a few more breaths as he read through the paper again, fighting the urge to burn it as he thought about the man who must have wrote it. Eventually he held it back out to Eli. "You know this fax is from a week ago, right?"

" *What?* " Elijah blurted as he took the paper back, his eyes imminently going to the corner and spotting the date. "Oh." He sighed, pursing his lips. "I must have lost track of time… Was it really a week…?" He shook his head. "No matter, I'll still head on over. She might still be there, if not a little worse for wear."

"Yeah, she's not." Clark shook his head.

Elijah raised a brow. "How do you know that?"

Clark was about to tell the truth, but quickly looked away. No point in admitting what he did to man he barely knew. "I just do." He opted for instead. "You'll just have to believe me; you'll be wasting your time if you go over there."

He knew Elijah wanted to hear more, but in the end didn't press for it. He instead shrugged and put the letter back in his pocket. "I suppose I should be thankful…" He muttered. "Getting there only to find her gone would have indeed been a waste of time."

Clark nodded and when the silence stretched on, he figured there was no point in extending this liaison for longer than necessary. He opened his mouth to say goodbye but before he could Elijah looked up at him, his eyebrows pulling together.

“I have to ask-- did you manage to get a look at her?” At Clark's expression he brought up his hands. “If I am to believe you when you say she wasn’t there on your last visit, then I have to assume so you at least saw her.”

Clark swallowed, the vivid memory of her body and face coming to mind. “I did.”

Elijah pulled out a notebook from his jacket, and flipped it open. He then reached for the pen behind his ear and brought them together. “Then, if it's not too much trouble, could you describe her to me?”

“*What* ?” Clark scowled. “Why the fuck would I do that?”

“Oh, you don’t need to tell me about her wounds or her level of decomposition. I just want to know the scale colour.” He looked at Clark expectantly, and when he remained silent. “I can pay you if that makes a difference?”

I doesn't, Clark wanted to say, and yet he didn’t. “Why do you want to know what colour her scales were?” He ended up asking.

“Well, if they were a certain colour, i'll feel better about not getting to examine her.”

Clark was still confused, but with a shrug he said. “Green. Like seaweed.”

The look on Elijah’s face was hard to discern, but the number one emotion Clark noticed was disappointment. He didn’t even bother writing anything down, sliding his notepad and pen back into his pockets with a sigh. “I thought as much, but still, it was nice to not have the possibility of it being an abyssal fin that got away plague me. Here. Your payment--” he reached into his back pocket for his wallet, and when it opened, Clark couldn’t help his mouth dropping at the obscene number of notes bursting from within. Elijah pulled out a single hundred dollar bill and held it out to Clark.

He took it, giving it once over as Elijah put away his wallet. As he folded the note and put it in his own, he tilted his head, eyeing Elijah as he adjusted his coat. “What colour were you wanting the mer to be?”

“Hum?” Elijah asked, as though pulled from another thought, and after a moment, he nodded rapidly. “Oh, the scales. Right. You see, my research primarily concerns abyssal fins, so if they’re algas or helios fins, I’m not as fussed about not being able to examine them.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“The scales; the colour corresponds to their species.” He said simply. When Clark frowned, he continued. “Well, you didn’t think there was only once species of mer, right?” He began to smile, before seeing Clark’s face remain the same. He cleared his throat, his smile quickly retreating. “There are hundreds, maybe even thousands of species of mer, each with different traits and evolutionary backgrounds. The more common mers; the algas and helios varieties, are categorized by their green or yellow scales, abyssal fins on the other hand are categorized by black scales.”

“Black scales?” Clark made a face. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a mer with black scales.”

“Oh, no one has.” Elijah agreed. “They’re extremely rare, some even say they’re now extinct. In fact, most would say they’re now extinct.”

Clark huffed. “And yet you seemed to think one would be hanging it up in Cottonwood.”

“Well, I didn’t think they actually found an abyssal fin, but my contact mentioned almost catching a black fin in our previous correspondence, and I had hoped that he’d been successful this time around and *that* mer would be the one I was collecting today.”

“And a black fin. That’s a…?”

“Another species of mer.” Elijah nodded. “Though, the name is actually a misnomer. Their scales are actually dark blue in colour, not black.”

At the words Clark swallowed thickly. *He couldn’t mean…* “*Dark* blue?” He repeated.

Elijah nodded. “Right. It has to be a dark blue. A light or aqua blue is indicative of a nuage or pavos fin, but a dark blue is only found in black fins. I won’t bore you with all of my theories, but it’s my belief that black fins are the closest relatives of the abyssal fins, and abyssal fins are just--” He closed his eyes, a small pulling across his lips. “They’re the purest of mers. They reside in the deepest parts of the oceans; their bodies having perfectly adapted to the high pressure and darkness.” Elijah closed his eyes, a smile pulling across his face. “What I wouldn’t give to see one in the flesh. Alas, you’d have to be way down at the bottom of the ocean to have a hope of seeing one alive.”

“You don’t say.” Clark said almost mechanically. Something about what he was hearing was stirring up a thought in his mind, but he didn’t know what exactly, so with mild trepidation; he waited.

“Oh yes.” Elijah nodded. “See, the reason most think they’re extinct is due to the only recent evidence of them still existing being a corpse that washed up during the last big quake. Mers of all species washed up on shores after the Metropolis quake, but one of them was bloated beyond all recognition. It had decompressed; violently, might I add, and the only fin ever theorized to live deep enough in the ocean for explosive decompression to occur, is, you guessed it, the abyssal fin.”

“Right.” Clark mumbled. Why was he thinking about his dream right now? The feeling of the water was coming back to him, the pressure, that same feeling of anticipation. *The water. What was in the water?*

“I will say I’ve enjoyed our talk.” Elijah said with a smile. “My contemporaries might think my theories and practices are… controversial. But I know that my research will amount to something, unlike theirs. How many times can we reread the same paper discussing inter-species communication or migration patterns before we know all there is? Truth of the matter is that there is so much more to mers than what meets the eye, and I plan on proving my theories. One way or another.”

Clark had long since stopped listening. His mind in another place entirely.

The bottom of the ocean. Deep down in the ocean--

--A lone eel in the water. Black eyes in the darkness. Sharp teeth snapping shut.

The image flooded his mind.

Clark gagged.

He bent over as dribbles of saliva left his mouth. Nothing else left his system thankfully, even as he felt his eyes start to swim. Elijah's hand hovered near his shoulder, though never made contact. "Um. Are you okay?"

"I just--" Clark gasped, but he didn't go on. He saw it. For a split second, he saw something he'd thought he purged from his mind.

He pulled back, stepping away from Elijah and bumping into another person as he did. "It was nothing. Thanks for the chat Doc but I gotta go." He whirled around and practically ran down the dock.

"Wait!" Elijah yelled. But Clark didn't wait; didn't stop for a moment, even as he heard him yell. "If you find a fin, let me know! I'll pay you! Good money!"

He only stopped running when the sound of the marina was nothing more than a faint hum.

Once he was in the city proper; he doesn't remember what he did next. Doesn't remember much of anything until he was standing back on his boat. With the city of Sacramento already becoming a faint smudge away in the distance.

He looked at the supplies he must have bought, then out at the open water he currently sailed through. How he got here, and how long he had been here was beyond him. The main thing he focused on was that his mind was quiet for now, with not even a faint memory of the past few hours managing to make its way though. That was good though, Clark tried to rationalize. His memory was asleep and he didn't want to reawaken it by prodding it with questions.

It was as he looked at the package wrapped in wax paper in and among his other supplies that he debated what he was going to do once he could go back home. He could go and try and lure the mer tonight. That would be the most productive use of his time.

Or, he could fall into bed and ignore the world until morning.

That’s what he ended up doing, his mind and body capable of little else in that moment.

Chapter End Notes

Happy new year to you all!

I hope you liked this chapter. Istg I may need to add 'mystery' to the tags, cause I am just laying on the intrigue thick and fast.

That is mostly cause there is a lot going on behind the scenes of this universe, and in order for us to get to the real meat of Clark and Blue's relationship, I have to lay a lot of ground work.

I know you guys want smooches, and they will come! Eventually! But we gotta w o r k for the smooches.

Until then I hope you all enjoy this fic of mine, and let me know your theories and ideas! Honestly seeing you guys theorize and wonder what is going to happen makes me so so happy -w-

Anyway! I will catch you all next time! x

Chapter 12

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

28th of May 2016

I slept last night, which is something. No dreams whatsoever. Though I can feel them there, lurking in my mind. I know if I think too hard they'll come back to me, so for now, I'm just going to do my best to distract myself.

Good thing I have plans for today.

As Clark brought his boat to stop at his usual fishing spot, he gave a cursory look around the water.

He was out later than he usually would be, but given the mer was more active at night, he figured early evening would be the best time to strike. The sun was hanging low in the sky by the time he walked out onto the swim platform, and he paused to breath the crisp air. Summer was almost here and Clark relished the warmth in the breeze.

He picked up the bucket he had prepared earlier, and with no other thought in mind other than what he had set out to do, he threw the contents out into the water.

The fish guts and blood sloshed out and with a wet slap collided with the waves. The blood quickly dissipated, leaving only a trail of murky brown to hint at it being there. The organs however remained floating in place, bobbing up and down with each press of the tide.

Clark didn't know what he was expecting to happen. Really, he should have waited until he knew the mer was at least near by before emptying the bucket, but he didn't, and now instead of the mer, there was a shark coming to investigate. Great.

Clark didn’t count himself out yet, even if it was looking to turn out that way. He did have another ace up his sleeve, but he had hoped to present it to the mer when he was able to at least speak with it, and not to just throw it into the water and hope it would appear.

As the shark circled the boat and displaced the bucket's contents even further in its search, Clark quickly remembered things never panned out how he wanted them too and hoping otherwise here was foolish.

The shark looped around the boat a few more times, and when no more food appeared in the waters, it swam away, leaving a now sullen Clark alone once more. He let out a sigh, and set himself down on the floor, crossing his legs as he stared at the spot where the fish guts had once been. “Good job, Clark. Why don’t you just throw yourself in there now? Might work better...” he muttered to himself.

He covered his face with his hands as he tried to think up his next move. As he thought, he heard the water splash and figured it was the shark coming back around for a second pass. “Go away, there is nothing for you here.” He muttered. There was no response, not that Clark expected one from a shark. After hearing another splash, he looked up, expecting to see a grey fin, but was instead confronted with an icy glare. “Holy shit.” He let out. “Uh.”

The mer looked at him, a small scowl pulling down at it’s lips. When Clark tried to stand, it retreated into the water, and Clark found himself holding his hands out, pleading to it. “Wait!” The mer’s ears twitched at the shout. “Please, don’t swim away.”

It didn’t. It stayed in place, and whether it was because it understood him, or because Clark just so happened to look rather pathetic as he spoke, he didn't know. But it stayed, and that was the important thing. Eventually Clark got up onto his knees, edging closer to the edge as he kept his eyes on the mer. “I don’t know how much you can understand, but I wanted to tell you I am sorry.” The mer ears twitched, and when it ducked into the water Clark nearly threw in the towel, wanting to go back inside and retreat himself, but the mer didn't leave. It swam closer, poking its head back out of the water once it was by the platform's edge.

When the mers full attention was on him, Clark let out a breath he didn't even know he had been holding. “I was angry." He began. "I was angry because of Diana, because of what she said, and I took that out on you, which I shouldn’t have done.” Clark pursed his lips, bringing his hands together and looking at his connected fingers. “She had a point though-- annoyingly. I mean, I really shouldn’t be talking to you. I shouldn’t be interacting with you period, but--” Clark frowned. “I am.”

“I don’t know why, really.” He shrugged. “Your kind hurt humans. Eat them, and drag them into the water. I’ve seen it, and the fact of the matter is, you aren't much better. Sure, I ain’t seen you kill a human, but you snapped that other mers neck like it was nothing so it’s not like you’re above killing.”

He chanced a look at the mer, and saw those eyes on him, bright and curious. He looked away again. “Maybe that’s why I keep coming back to you. Despite it all, you intrigue me. You ain’t like any mer I’ve ever seen, and maybe…” he thought to Dr. Hadal’s words as his eyes swiped over the dark blue scales across his body. “Maybe that means you’re not like others. Maybe you’re... good.”

At the word, the mer pointed at itself and nodded. Clark couldn’t help but smile. “Okay, maybe not *good* good but not evil, at least.”

“Which leads me to the last part of my apology.” Clark got up from his spot, and ignored the mers chirps as he made his way inside. He went into the small kitchenette and found the plate he had prepared earlier; wrapped in tinfoil on the counter. Beneath the foil was his surprise. He had cooked it earlier, letting it rest on the ride over.

He walked back to the platform and sat down. “I figured this was the best way for me to say sorry, considering words are, you know...” He trailed off, before pulling the foil away. The mer came in close to investigate, its nose twitching as it hovered over the plate. “It’s steak. Prime rib. I figured you’ve never eaten beef before, so...” He brought the plate closer to the mer. “I won’t lie. It ain’t raw. I did grill it, but just for a couple seconds each side, and I think you’ll agree the taste is just…" Clark had to swallow his saliva as he looked at it. He wished he had brought another for himself whilst in Sacramento, but considering he doesn’t even remember buying this one, he should be thankful he managed to get even one.

The mer sniffed at it for a little while longer, then with great hesitation and a few quiet chirps, brought its hand out of the water, reaching for the steak and picking it up. It brought its other hand to poke at the crust, scraping its claw across the char grilled surface, before dragging it across his tongue as though testing it.

It must have liked what it tasted as it immediately sunk its jaws into the steak, its pupils dilating. As it ripped the steak apart, Clark was both equal parts horrified and impressed. He knew its teeth were sharp, but seeing them practically slide through the meat reminded Clark of just how capable of a predator was before him.

He had hoped the mer would take it’s time eating the steak as Clark himself would do if given such a prime cut, but no, within moments the steak was gone and it was gnawing at the bone with unparalleled intensity. When even that was picked clean, it dropped the bone into the water and went for the plate, screaming at the empty surface as though somehow, more would appear if it screamed for long enough.

Clark laughed when the mer turned its angry stare his way. “That’s it.” He held up his hands to show they were empty. “There is no more.”

The mer glared as it slammed the plate against the platform, its screeches growing louder.

Clark’s smile didn’t falter. “Sorry, but that’s your lot. You should have savoured it.”

More screeching came along with a few hand gestures, but eventually it quieted down, though not without throwing the plate out into the water.

It pouted as it descended under the water, sitting just below the surface, arms crossed. Clark tried to prevent himself from laughing at it further, but failed. “Come on now, don’t be like that...” When the mer didn’t move from it’s spot, Clark put his hand into the water, splashing it around just underneath the surface. “Don’t pout.” He said softly.

The mer looked up at his hand and Clark thought about pulling it out now that he had the mers attention, but he didn’t. He kept it submerged even as he saw the mer unfold its arms, and bring its own hand up to meet his.

Clark held his breath as he waited. Was this it? Would the mer try and pull him down now that the moment was just right? Now that they were alone? Or was he really right about it not being like the others? He just didn’t know, and that feeling of uncertainty finally emerged from the pit of emotions bundled up in his stomach, sidling right up alongside the guilt, which, of course, hadn't gone anywhere, only lessening.

The mer’s hand touched his, those long claws sliding between his fingers, and once they were through, closing around them gently.

Clark didn’t let go. Didn’t try to tug his hand free, but slowly, he brought his hand back up, lifting the mer up in the water.

Then, before he knew it, there it was, back in front of him, its face no longer petulant and instead filled with awe.

As Clark watched its face, trying to read the minutiae of the emotions passing across it, a burning question he'd had for so long came back to him. "Can you understand me?"

The mer's ears flicked as it let go of Clark's hand. Whether it recognized a word or perhaps the whole sentence, it pointed at its own ears and gestured to the world around them, before shaking its head.

"So, that's a no?" Clark frowned. "But then, how…" he huffed. "You have to understand parts of what i'm saying, right? Otherwise how do you even know what I'm asking you?"

It's expression grew pained, and once again, it pointed at its ears, but this time waved its hand by them. It then made a motion of opening and closing his hand by his ear, and again repeated that same waving motion with another shake of the head.

Clark tried to understand the motions, but eventually he held up his hand to stop the mer from repeating them over and over, as with each attempt Clark only grew more confused. "I still don't follow."

The mer huffed, and ducked into the water. Clark almost protested, but when he saw it make those same motions, this time underwater, he saw it nodding instead of shaking its head, and after a minute or so it came back up, its eyes wide with anticipation.

"Something about the water?" Clark ventured.

The mer squinted as though focusing in on those words, and this time nodded rapidly, chirping over and over as it repeated the motions, above water this time. That hand by its ear opened and closed and now the mer made a high pitched screech. It ducked into the water, and when it repeated the motion, Clark instead heard it make another noise entirely, a quiet hum that sounded almost musical.

When it came back out of the water, Clark's mouth fell open. "The water." He said looking at the waves. "You hear better in the water? Is that it?"

More squinting, and this time instead of nodding the mer lunged for him. Clark fell back with a thud against the platform, and for one horrifying moment he expected to feel the rush of water over his

body. But that didn’t happen. Instead he found himself looking up into the mer’s face as it grinned down at him, chirping away.

“Okay, okay.” Clark muttered, clearing his throat and ignoring the heat across his face. “You may be able to understand me a little, but I still can’t understand you. Like, at all.”

More chirps came and the mer lowered itself closer to his face, so close Clark could suddenly smell the steak on it’s breath. His eyes blew wide as he pushed the mer back. “*Whoa* now, what are you doing?”

The mer only frowned, grasping at Clark’s hands that held it up and away, but Clark didn’t move them. Eventually it chirped and pointed at Clark’s forehead, and when Clark still didn’t move his hands, the pointing turned to tapping, then before long, slapping.

“Ow, fine!” Clark removed his hands, and the mer fell back against him. Clark looked away, and tried to ignore the fact that the mer was completely on top of him, specifically, certain *parts* of him, and hoped it would do what it wanted to do and then get back in the water where Clark didn’t have to deal with seeing all of its body, much less feeling it.

The mer slowly lowered itself back down. Clark watched it for a moment, and tried to ignore what he was feeling. He told himself the gentle touch of the mers hands on either side of his jaw didn't feel nice, and how the weight of it’s forehead on his own wasn’t comforting. No, these gestures meant nothing, and he had to remember that. He closed his eyes and waited.

It stayed there, face pressed against his for a few minutes, and even as the time ticked by, Clark felt he didn't have it in himself to push it away a second time. So he lay there, waiting to see what it would do next. Eventually the mer made a few noises, low in the back of its throat, and when even more time passed, Clark eventually opened his eyes and saw the frown on the mers face as it pulled away. "Uh." Clark said, tilting his head. "Was that meant to do something?"

The mer slapped him on the forehead again, and this time Clark let out a gasp. "Hey!" Clark barked. "Don't hit me!"

Ignoring him, the mer hit him once more for good measure before apparently giving up on the endeavour and rolling off of Clark and onto the platform. It gave a few more half hearted chirps before wiggling it's way off and back into the water, where it once again commenced its sullen bobbing.

Clark sighed. "Look, I'm sorry for yelling, but you *were* hitting me." The mer's expression stayed the same, so Clark asked. "What were you even trying to do?"

The mer only waved him off, and Clark couldn't exactly blame it. If he had to perform charades every time he had to convey anything, he'd get fed up too. He supposed he could try and teach it sign language, but given that he didn't know sign language himself that idea failed before it even started.

He doubted the mer was going to come out of its tantrum anytime soon, so rather than let the day go to waste, Clark grabbed his fishing rod and started to fish. Eventually the mer must have realised there was no point in sulking and ducked into the water, swimming underneath where Clark's line lay. As Clark watched him through the water, he realised just how difficult he was to spot, and if Clark was having difficulty, he knew the fish had no chance, as evident by the ones ending up in his bucket. The mer swam around in sharp bursts, snatching the errant fish and dumping them in Clark's bucket far quicker than he was managing to. Eventually the bucket became full, and Clark put the line down. As the mer came back with another fish, Clark shook his head, pointing at the mer. "You eat that one, I got plenty."

The mer looked at the fish, and without any more encouragement, bit its head off, crunching down on its skull. Clark looked away wincing. "Jesus, you really aren't a picky eater are you?"

It made a face and must have understood what Clark's words and grimace meant, as its next bite was smaller and less filled with bones. That only made Clark feel worse and he sighed. "Sorry, I wasn't trying to make you feel bad. You eat it however you wanna eat it."

He didn’t know if the words got through, as it still didn’t resume its earlier evisceration of the fish, but as it finished one, it brought its hand up to the bucket and looked to Clark, it’s eyes going towards the pile of still twitching fish within. Clark nodded. “Go nuts.”

The mer brought another fish to its mouth and crunched down on its skull, and this time Clark fought to keep his expression neutral. The mer only ate one more fish after that, which would have had Clark questioning how he was able to eat so much, but given how muscular the mer was, it stood to reason it had to eat a lot to maintain its size.

Once it had had its fill, it flopped onto its back and floated on the water for a moment. It closed its eyes and began to swim, pushing itself along with broad strokes of its tail. As it looped around the boat Clark started to put his fishing gear away, and once that was done, returned to his spot to watch it swim.

It was hypnotizing to watch. With each press of its tail, it glided through the water effortlessly. But, with the way it was swimming, Clark had no choice but to stare at the pale skin of its chest.

Well, he supposed he could stare at his own hands, or the water, or Hell even the sky, but with each splash of water the mers tail caused, Clark found his eyes being drawn to it, watching the way it moved.

Ordinarily he didn’t feel much looking at a mer. He knew objectively they were attractive, but everything else he knew about them made that physical appeal not go very far. Sadly, this mer didn’t look like other mers, didn’t act like other mers, and as far as Clark was considered, it may as well not have been one if the way he was acting around it was anything to go by.

He helped it, fed it, saved it, and now here he was watching it as it swam lazy circuits around his boat. He had told himself the apology was for his own selfish needs; to be able to sleep properly at night and deal with the guilt slowly crushing him, but in reality he just didn’t want to see the mer be mad at him anymore. Something about seeing its cold stare aimed his way, hit him more than any punch ever could.

But it also invited with it a whole host of thoughts Clark didn’t want to deal with. As he watched the mer, his eyes sticking to the milky skin of its chest, he thought of what it had felt like to feel that skin on him. To feel the weight of another person on top of him brought back memories of a time where he was used to that sort of physically, now all it did was cause his body to grow hot and his mind to grow fuzzy.

He tried to tell himself that it was a mer, and that what he was feeling was part of what made them such evil predators, but that was just it. The mer wasn't even *trying* to seduce him, at least, not in a way Clark was familiar with. Last he'd checked hitting and screeching were not effective ways to get into someone's pants, so *why* was it doing it?

Well, it's working for you. Clark's mind provided and he groaned at the thought. Of course, here he was catching feelings for something that any normal person wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole. Even the die hard merners out there would side eye Clark for his inexplicable taste. 'There are less ugly ones, you know' they'd say 'ones that don't crunch on skulls and scream all the time', and Clark would have to explain how this mer--

This mer *was* beautiful.

He groaned again, and shoved his hands into his sockets for good measure. When he looked back at the mer it was still swimming around lazily, and as the sun finally dipped below the horizon, the air grew cold and the night sky shone above them. Clark would normally leave now, but the mer was still here, and he found he couldn't leave it just yet.

It, he repeated. *It.* Why *it* ?

Porter's words came back to him. *'I don't know about your mer, but Elyss was a woman, Yana is a woman, they are not 'its ' or 'things.'*

He knew objectively it was male. Hell, it had all the same features Clark had, just with a few additions. Namely a tail and claws and scales and-- well, quite a lot of stuff actually now that Clark thought about it, but the main thing he dwelled on was that the mer wasn't an it. "You're male." Clark said quietly.

The mer stopped swimming then. He looked at Clark, tilting his head as though asking Clark to repeat himself. He didn't though; what he had said was for Clark himself to hear and understand. The mer didn't need to know. "It's nothing." Clark muttered with a wave of his hand. "Go back to swimming."

Clark ended up staying out in the open water that night, and even as he fell asleep on the platform, he didn't awaken during the night to the feeling of water rushing across his body. Instead, he opened his eyes come morning and saw the mer perched on the edge of platform, resting his head on his folded arms.

The mer awoke a few minutes later. As he let out a yawn and sent a tired smile Clark's way, Clark swallowed thickly. The mer had stayed here all night; had most likely kept the errant mers away as he slept, and more importantly didn't drag him into the water.

Even as Clark got up and washed his face in the bathroom, he could feel the pit within himself growing, and knew full well what was causing it. He grit his teeth as he stared at himself in the mirror, trying to will away those thoughts away. He had to be strong here.

He had to be.

Chapter End Notes

Here it isssss!!!

I hope you all liked this chapter. Clark no longer sees Blue as an it! He's making progress. Slowly! XD

I had a lot of fun writing Blue and Clark's antics this chapter, and I hope you are all liking it too! We shall have to see what our boys get up to next chapter ;)

As always, lemme know your thoughts! And I will see you all next time! Take care :3

Chapter 13

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

June 5th 2016

I had that dream last night. I was at the bottom of the ocean again but this time when I looked out into the water, I saw something in the distance. It wasn't what I was expecting, though; it was a lake.

Why there was a lake down there, I don't know, but I slowly started drifting towards it and when I got to the edge, I woke up.

I didn't go back to sleep that night; I just ended up reading, trying to keep the dream from my mind.

I think I know what's down there, and I just don't know if I can deal with seeing it right now.

June 12th 2016

The mer has been coming to the island pretty much every day now.

When I go out to fish, he's there. When I'm watering crops, he's there. Heck even when I'm sleeping, I get woken up by him screaming at me from the water.

I figured he wouldn't want to sleep in the tub when he wasn't, you know, nearly dying, but some nights he'd be screaming at me so much I'd have no choice but to go out and get him. Worst part is I know the little shit can get inside without me carrying him, but no, he has to be carried or else he'll keep screaming.

Once in the tub, he won't go to sleep or anything, he'll stay awake and hit me with his tail, but at least he'd quiet down.

Why he does it, I don't know. Maybe he likes the company. Maybe he just wants to annoy me. At the end of the day, I won't say I haven't gotten anything from the arrangement. For one, my dreams have been, well, not good, but they've definitely not gotten any worse.

For one thing, I'm still just dreaming of that lake. I'm floating at the edge of it now, watching the surface. It looks like liquid smoke. It's mesmerising in a way, but I always wake up before I see it.

It's coming back to me, despite how much I want to pretend it isn't.

I'm remembering what I saw down there.

June 17th 2016

Of course after saying he's been coming by everyday, the mer disappears. It happened a few days back; he went out to swim and then just didn't come back that night.

He's back now, though. He looks fine, if a little tired, so I figure he just wanted some space. Can't blame him for that.

June 20th 2016

Well, I knew it would happen eventually. I need to get supplies. I'm out of pretty much everything, and whilst I could go to Manton, I know I need to see what things are like at Cottonwood.

I just need to know everything's going okay there, and then I can retreat to my island for another month.

Wish me luck.

There was a complication Clark hadn't foreseen whilst planning his trip to Cottonwood.

His boat had barely left the shallows before he realised he had a stalker. He knew the mer was following his boat, trailing along just underneath it, and ordinarily Clark wouldn't mind. The mer would join him whilst he fished and then come back to the island with him come evening, but this time, things were different. Clark couldn't risk him swimming near Cottonwood given what had happened last time. So, he stopped his boat the moment he felt his presence, and came out onto the platform, yelling to the mer when he saw him poke out from the water. "No. Stay. *Here.* Don't follow me."

The mer however, only screeched in response, coming up close to the platform and slapping his fists on the wood. Clark crouched down, and took those hands in his, holding them gently. "Stay here." He repeated, softly this time. "It's too dangerous for you to come with me, okay?"

The mer frowned, and bared his teeth and Clark only rolled his eyes. He set the mers hands down into the water, and stood up. "Yeah, yeah, you're a big scary mer, but there are bad men where I'm going, so unless you want to end up in a net again, you will stay here."

That at least seemed to have the intended effect, as the mer slowly slid into the water, grumbling. Clark pointed to the island, and this time the mer didn't screech, simply slipping under the waves, and swimming away. Clark watched him until he was back underneath the jetty and only then did he continue on his way to Cottonwood.

He still made sure the mer didn't try to resume his stalking from afar but from what Clark could tell; he was still at the island. It did however remind him of something he'd noticed about the mer a few days prior.

Namely, his heart beat.

Clark only noticed it when they had been out fishing. The mer was above water with him, but as Clark was retrieving another fishing pole, he slipped and bumped one of the railings on the platform. A bolt came off and bounced across the wood before falling into the water with a faint splash. Clark let out a sigh and made a mental reminder to fix it when he got home, but the mer paused his swimming and quickly dove down, following the bolt. Clark watched him through the water and it was then that he

heard the shift. His heartbeat slowed considerably, but there was also a change in tone that would have caused Clark to think it was a completely different person under normal circumstances. Humans couldn't exactly change their heartbeats, so he'd never faced this issue before when listening to one and as such he found himself transfixed on the sound. It was familiar to him, but he couldn't explain why.

Clark watched the mer as he went deeper and deeper, but after only a few moments, he stopped abruptly. The mer managed to catch the bolt early in its descent, and was soon back on the surface, setting the metal onto the platform with a triumphant grin. Clark still listened to his heart and now that it was back above, heard the same familiar thudding he was growing used to. But there was more to it than that. He couldn't place why, but the mer felt different now. As he stared at his hands, he could have sworn the scales there looked darker, as did his eyes. Clark pushed those thoughts away for now, and crouched down. "Thank you." He murmured before taking the bolt from the floor. The mer chirped, his grin growing, before diving back into the water and resuming his laps.

A few minutes later Clark looked at the mer, seeing that same shade of blue he knew. It was then that he told himself that the change he saw was just his mind playing tricks on him, as it often liked to do.

But that day did teach him something. Now, he knew to listen out for two different tones when keeping tabs on the mer, and as he stepped off at Cottonwood, he could safely say he heard neither.

He was however more focused on who else was in the marina with him.

"Clark!" Came Elijah's voice as he approached, his pace brisk. "What a wonderful coincidence!"

At the voice alone, Clark found himself rooted firmly in place. He was sure if that wasn't the case, he would have made a run for it already, but as it stood he had indeed not moved an inch by the time Elijah stopped in front of him. "Hi Doc." Clark let out, his eyes darting around the marina, first to the archway, then to a boat he didn't recognize. It must have been Elijah's and that theory was confirmed when he peered through the hull and noticed the large black bag within. He stopped himself from looking through it. "What brings you here?" He asked, trying his best to sound normal.

"Oh, right." Elijah said, gesturing towards his boat. "Another mer turned up. Thankfully, I was able to pick this one up before it disappeared." He said with a wink. "Though, it wasn't a black fin, I thought I'd make the trip Cottonwood on this occasion, as I won't lie, my visit had something to do with you."

"Did it, now?" Clark asked, his stare still fixated on the bag within the boat.

“Yes, you see, when I got back to my lab upon our last meeting, I sent a fax through to my contact about why I didn’t show. I told him I bumped into you at Sacramento and you mentioned the mer was no longer there, so I needn't bother coming, and upon mention of your name, he revealed to me that it was *you* that took the black fin from him on that fateful day. Well, when I heard that I was positively elated! I was worried some fisherman without any sense took the mer without any idea as to its value, but you, you I know are a man with sense, so I decided to get my affairs in order, and once I had lo and behold my contact had found another mer here, so I thought I’d kill two birds with one stone; I'd come collect the mer he’d found, and learn from the locals as to which island you reside. I’d hoped to pay you a visit and discuss matters, but lo! Here you are, as though by fate!” His grin grew if that were possible. “Which leads me to my next question…”

“He’s not for sale.” Clark blurted, and at Elijah’s surprise he went on. “The mer, i’m not selling him.”

“Right.” Elijah said, and despite how much he tried to hide it, Clark could see the disappointment simmering just below that calm exterior. “Of course, I understand you must be rather fond of him. My contact mentioned you were… *involved* with the mer.”

Involved, Clark fought the urge to roll his eyes. Instead he shook his head. “It’s not like that, we’re just, sort of…” he winced as a whole slew of confusing thoughts came to mind. “I don’t know, but the point is, there is no amount of money you could offer me to give him to you.”

“Clark, I admire your conviction, but unlike some breeds, black fins are extremely hostile. If he’s not tried to attack you yet, he's most likely biding his time. They’re ambush predators, you see, they wait and wait, and just when the moment is right…” he pressed his lips together. “They pounce.”

~~*Oh, look, a person speaking sense. Perhaps you should listen to them, or will you just tell them to fuck off like you did Diana?*~~ Clark shook his head, ignoring the voice, despite the doubt quickly settling on his shoulders. “This ones different, he’s… not *not* hostile. At least, he isn't with me.”

“Then let me examine him!” Elijah pleaded, coming forward. “If you say this black fin is an anomaly, let me see for myself. You needn't give him to me, but I will pay you whatever amount you desire simply for the opportunity to *look* at him.”

Clark wasn’t convinced, but he still raised a brow. “Just to look?”

“Yes!” Elijah blurted. “Do you know how rare of an opportunity this is? To study a pure black fin, I'd finally be able to confirm my theories, I'd be able to study their bone structure, their scales, oh the possibilities…” Elijah trailed off, and when he looked up to Clark, there were tears in his eyes. “My whole life, I’ve dedicated myself to the study of deep sea mers, and I have yet to see a pure one, alive, in person. Half fins, or dead mers are what all my research is based on. One that is alive, is worth more than its weight in gold to me.”

The grimace Clark felt pulling across his face was one that refused to leave even when he knew he should probably tone it down lest offend the Doctor. In the end he let out a sigh, shaking his head. “Look Doc, I appreciate you’re passionate, but this mer isn’t a science project.”

“I apologize.” Elijah said, genuine remorse on his face. “I know I can sometimes sound ‘clinical’ when I discuss mers, but I promise you it only comes from a place of adoration. You see, today's mers are the branches of their phylogenetic tree, and the abyssal fins are the roots. To see a pure blooded black fin, would be akin to seeing a living homo erectus; the theoretically ‘link’ between the mers of the deep and the mers above. Oh, what I would be able to learn from just--”

Clark held up his hand. “Look, you keep saying that word, but how do you know my one’s ‘pure’? He could be a ‘half fin’ too for all you know.”

Elijah didn’t even pause. “Why, his colouring. Bare in mind I am speaking purely based upon what my contact has told me about the mer, but the dark blue scaling on the hands and ears is an indicator of a pure blooded mer, if the ears and hands are humanoid, well…” Elijah frowned. “That means the blood has been tainted.

Clark grimaced. “Right.”

“Anyway, that’s beside the point.” Elijah turned that pitiful stare on him once more, as he brought his hands together as though in prayer. “I will pay you good money simply to see your mer in the flesh. All you need do is bring him to my lab, i’ll run a few tests, give you your money and then you are both free to leave.”

Clark wanted to say no, but felt Elijah wasn’t a man to take no easily, especially with something like this. “I'll think about it.” He settled on, and fought back the urge to recoil when Elijah jumped to him, his hands settling on his shoulders with a fierce grip.

“Yes, of course!” He chimed. “Take as long as you need to think about it, and when you are ready simply call me. You still have my number don’t you?” He let go and reached into his front pocket and

pulled out a small business card. “If you don’t, my phone number is on there. Feel free to call any time.” He cleared his throat, turning to his boat. "Now, I better head off, the mer is already a few days old, and I don’t want to let decomposition take an ever greater hold. It was good to see you Clark. Take care.”

As he walked away, Clark couldn't help it. He called out. “Hey, Doc!” When Elijah stopped, Clark jerked his head to the boat. “The mer in there. Is is male or female?”

Elijah paused, his head tilting for a moment. “Male, why do you ask?”

Clark let out a sigh of relief, that quickly morphed into a cough at Elijah’s curious stare. “Was just curious. Uh, you have a good day, Doc.” He mumbled, before making his way out of the marina.

Thankfully, he managed to get to Lucy’s without any other interruptions. He kept an eye out for Antonio but at no point did the man make an appearance, and for that small mercy Clark couldn’t express how grateful he was.

He also spotted Marcos through the windows of the mechanics as he walked past, but with Salvator right there beside him, Clark kept his head down and continued walking. Hoping neither spotted him.

The bell chimed as he stepped through the door to the store, and at the sound Lucy’s eyes pulled away from the book she was reading. Clark sent her a smile. “Hey there, Luce.”

“Clark!” She said with a grin, setting her book down. “I was just thinking I hadn’t seen you in a while. How you been?”

“Okay, all things considered.” He said, taking a look at the shelves. He picked up a basket and started putting a few items in as he spoke. “How about you? Have things been okay here?”

“Same old same old.” She said with a bob of the head. “Oh, don’t know if you heard, but they found a buyer for Tom’s ranch. The guy didn’t want to raise cattle though, so they had a big cull a few days back. Got plenty of beef if you’re interested.”

“Oh?” Clark asked, quickly making his way down the aisle to the chillers at the end. Inside were bundles of meat wrapped in wax paper, and Clark quickly threw a few into his basket. “What's the guy gonna do with the land, then?”

“He’s a developer. Said he’s going to use the land for ‘up market’ homes, as apparently ‘this land is ripe for premium real estate.’” Lucy rolled her eyes. “It’s right next to the beach, and Porter’s house is the only other one nearby, so I suppose I see his point. There might be some rich folk out there who wanna come and live here, but he better hope that’s the case because that’s who his market is going to be. He told me the amount he thinks the houses will sell for when done and I laughed at him.”

Clark put a few more bundles of meat in his basket for good measure, and then picked up a few more items before heading to the counter. “That bad, huh?”

“Oh, you have no idea.” She huffed, ringing up his supplies. “All of us on the island, *combined*, don’t have enough to buy one of the houses he’s planning.” She let out a sigh. “But it’s his money, if he thinks Cottonwood has property potential, I suppose we should be thankful that there is someone wanting to do something with the land rather than it just sit there.”

“No one here wanted to take it on?”

“Colin had his eye on it, but then Walter-- the developer-- out bid him at the auction. Colin was steamed afterward, but hey, he should have known that that amount of land was going to cost a pretty penny, and that someone out there might have their eye on it, too.” She shrugged her shoulders.

Clark took those words in and felt himself frown. “Colin wanted the land?”

“Big time.” Lucy said. “Ever since he lost his boat, he’s been at a loss for what to do with himself. Antonio and Steve still take him along when they pick up our Redding orders, but given he’s not actually transporting anything himself anymore, he’s not making as much as he used to as the other two are taking a bigger cut for taking on more work.”

“I didn’t know he knew anything about ranching.” Clark said, reaching for his wallet. Speaking from experience, ranching was a rare trade to come by. Most islanders preferred to use their land for crops or smaller animals like chickens or goats. The amount of land required to keep cattle was generally reserved for larger islands that wouldn’t miss the land. In fact, the only reason his family raised them in Smallville was because that’s what his Pa’s dad did, and that was what his dad did, too. It was all his family knew, so the idea of turning the land to other uses never crossed their minds.

“Who, Colin?” Lucy shook her head. “Naw, I don’t think he’d have kept the land for ranching, either. I know him, and chances are he was just trying to make some quick cash. Get the land, and then divvy it up and sell it to anyone who’d buy it. Which is why I find it funny he’s pissed about what Walter’s doing. At the end of the day, they had the same idea, just Walter had more money to throw around to realise it.”

Clark grew quiet as he took out a few notes, and slid them across the counter. He found himself focusing on what Lucy had said, and more specifically what it meant.

Lucy reached for the money, before shaking her head with a smile. “Right, sorry, here I am prattling on and on about all this stuff that don’t matter… I’ll just get your receipt, Clark.”

“What? No.” Clark shook his head quickly. “It’s not like that, Luce. I was just thinking about what you were saying, is all.”

“Really? Didn’t think it was that interesting.” Lucy shrugged, setting his change on the counter, along with a hastily written receipt.

“To me it is.” Clark said, before taking his change.

“That’s fair enough.” Lucy said. “When you’re here all the time, things like this just seem par for the course and stop being interesting.”

“Maybe that’s why i'm interested. I’m not here all the time.”

“That’s a point.” Lucy said. “You know you’re always welcome, right? After last time, I was worried Antonio scared you off for good.”

“Antonio doesn’t scare me.” He said easily.

“Well, if that's the case.” She narrowed her eyes, bringing her hand up to point at his face. “You make sure to visit more. I worry about you out there all alone.”

“I’m not alone.” Clark said before he could stop himself, at Lucy’s raised brow he cleared his throat, looking away. “I mean, I--”

Lucy however just held up her hand and sighed. “Clark, I know you have a mer, you know you have a mer, heck, the whole island knows you have a mer. You ain’t slick, so quit it.”

Clark opened his mouth to argue, but in the end he didn’t. His mouth snapped closed. “Alright.”

“And speaking of mers...” Lucy said, leaning forward. She gave a quick look around the store and then spoke, her voice just above a whisper. “I wanted to thank you for what you did for Tom’s.”

“How do you know it was me?” Clark asked, raising a brow.

“Please, who else would it be.” She rolled her eyes. “I know that weird scientist comes by and collects them from time to time, but I had a feeling this time it was you.”

“Right.” Clark looked at her, as he let a smile touch his lips. “Was Antonio pissed?”

Lucy laughed. “Like you would not believe. I think he knows it was you, too, but, at the end of the day; what's he got to be mad about? Not like he lost anything important, just his ‘art piece.’”

Clark wanted to add that he did in fact lose something else with the disappearance of Elyss, but given the secrecy between him and Elijah in their faxes, Clark doubted anyone knew he was being paid for the bodies. He wondered what they’d think if that was the case, but given Lucy had to deal with Antonio to get her shipments, he didn’t want to drive a wedge where it wasn’t required, so he shrugged his shoulders. “That’s true, but given he already hates me, I had hoped for at least a little anonymity.”

“Well, you got it in a way. There’s no actual proof that it was you. People just think it, and you know how rumours are. One person says something and suddenly that's God's truth even if it isn’t.” She made a face. “Well, in this case it is, but you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do.” Clark nodded. Honestly, this was the best case scenario. He didn’t want anything to get back to Marcos or Porter, so if he needed to be the sole barer or blame, so be it.

There was a chime at the door, and Clark turned to it. A woman walked in and he quickly turned back to Lucy. “I better get going. Nice chatting, Luce.”

“You too, Clark. Remember what I said. Don’t be a stranger.”

He left soon after, but unlike his trip to Lucy’s, the journey back did get interrupted.

He was passing the mechanics once more, but this time when he peeked in Marcos spotted him this time. Before he had a chance to put his head down and walk away, Marcos’ eyes blew wide, and Clark heard the rushed conversation from within.

“Dad, I think I heard Lindo in the trash cans again.”

He heard Salvador sigh. “Ay dios mio… Well, go get him then. Be quick.”

Marcos all but ran from the shop and with a quick jerk of the head aimed Clark’s way, he made his way into the narrow alleyway beside the shop. Clark checked around the place, and when the coast was clear, he quickly followed suit.

He looked frazzled when he got to him, and before Clark could even get a word out, Marcos came up close to him, his hands resting on his shoulders, gripping the fabric there. “Hey, weird question have you seen my pocket knife?”

Clark pressed his lips together. “I can't say that I have, no.”

Marcos’ eyes grew wider if that were possible. “Are you sure? It’s not on your boat or anything?”

“If I'd seen it Marcos, I would tell you.”

“Oh, okay then.” Marcos took a shaky breath. “Sorry, just need a moment to process that.”

“Right.” Clark pursed his lips. “Wanna tell me why?”

Marcos groaned, pushing himself away from Clark and beginning to pace to and fro. “When I was cutting the mer down, I dropped my pocket knife, right? I thought I picked it up, but no, I must have missed it, and when I realised and went back the next morning, it wasn’t there anymore.” He turned to Clark, his eyes wide. “I thought at first I must have left it on your boat or something, but as you’ve just confirmed; it wasn’t there. Which means someone found it, which means, someone knows I was there that night, which means--”

“Whoa, whoa…” Clark interrupted, sensing Marcos was one sentence away from a full breakdown. “Look, I get you're worried, but why? I figured everyone here thought it was me.”

“Yeah, they do." Marcos said, swiping his hair back and wincing. “But still, someone has my knife, someone knows I was there that night and before you say it, they’ll know it’s mine 'cause it has my name etched in the side. My dad got it for me for my birthday...”

Clark grimaced. “Of course it does.”

“Hey!” Marcos snapped. “Don't give me attitude. This wouldn't have even happened if you didn't scare me!”

With a sigh, Clark came forward with the same care and speed as he would approach a wounded rabbit. “Right, and for that i’m sorry, truly, but like I said, if anyone asks about it, it was me who did it, alright? I acted alone and you weren’t there.”

“Yeah…” Marcos looked down at the floor. “I told myself something like that for the past month, but still, seeing you just reminded me and it was like--” he shivered. “I managed to forget how scared I was, but then it all came flooding back the second I saw you and it was like, I couldn’t breath. I kept thinking about my dad finding out; what he’d say, and I just… Panicked.” He turned to him then, his eyes full of worry. “Do you know what that’s like?”

Clark didn’t blink. “Yes.”

Marcos gave him a smile. “Right, sorry. I shouldn’t even be bothering you with this but I just felt like I had to tell you.”

“I get it.” Clark said, turning his head a fraction to the wall beside them. He saw Salvator get up from his seat, grumbling. “But just remember what I said. I acted alone, you don’t know anything, and if your knife shows up, you don’t know how it got on the dock.” When Salvator started approaching the doorway, Clark spoke. “You better get back, you’re dads looking for you.”

“Shit!” Marcos said, wiping his face with his shirt. “I’m really sorry about all this, Clark. I’ll see you when I see you.”

“See you.” Clark repeated, stepping aside as Marcos barreled past him. Once he was at the front of the store, stopping Salvator from coming around the corner, Clark heard the pair talk to one another before stepping back inside. When Clark was sure Salvator wouldn’t spot him, he made his way to his boat.

When he got back to the island, he saw the mer poke his head up from the water. He must have been dozing under the jetty and upon hearing Clark’s boat, woke up. Clark carried his shopping inside, and as he was setting things away he heard the mer shimmying across the sand towards his home. He sat in the doorway watching him, and when Clark picked up one of the packages wrapped in wax paper, he trilled.

“Oh, this?” Clark asked playfully. “You wanna know what this is?” He sat on the floor, and the mer came further inside until he was right in front of Clark, his nose twitching as the wax paper was slowly removed.

When the slab of beef came into view, the mer’s eyes blew wide and he lunged for it. Clark pulled it up and away, ignoring the screeches from the mer as it scrambled for it. “Hey hey, be patient. I ain’t even cooked yet.”

More screams were all he got in response to that, and Clark rolled his eyes. “If you want this, I need you to promise me something.”

The mer grew quiet, and despite the difficulty in communication, Clark figured he caught the gist of what he’d said, and hopefully all of what he was about to say. “Look, I know we have a weird… *Relationship*.” He made a face at the word and shook his head. "What i'm trying to say is, I don't want to see you get hurt again, and islands like Cottonwood are dangerous, okay? There are people on there that might hurt you, so I want you to promise me you won’t go there.”

The mer concentrated as he spoke, and after Clark finished speaking, he saw it make a face, a quiet grumble coming from its throat as though ready to disagree. “I mean it.” Clark said, slower this time. “There are bad men there. The ones that caught you and hurt you before. If you swim near there, they might catch you and--” Clark thought to Elijah, to intensity in his stare as he had spoken of mers and grimaced. “The point is, you are worth a lot to some people, and because of that, you need to be careful. So promise me you’ll be careful, and promise me you won’t try to follow me when I go there anymore.”

It took some time, but eventually Clark saw the mer nod. It was a very subtle gesture, accompanied with a whole host of grumbles, but the mer nodded and then brought out his hand to Clark. At first he thought he was after the meat, but when Clark tried to offer it, he shook his head, reaching for Clark’s free hand.

He took a hold of it, and squeezed it ever so slightly before letting go. Nodding again. Clark swallowed and before his mind bombarded him with any more confusing thoughts, he stood up and cleared his throat. “Okay, then. Well with that settled, let's cook you some steak.”

Due to the plethora of meat available, Clark was able to cook himself a steak this time, and as he sat down and began eating, he watched the mer devour his.

Clark should have expected it, but he still laughed all the same when the mer finished his steak and then came to him, pouting as he tried to reach for the half eaten one on his own plate.

In the end, the beef didn't last nearly as long as Clark thought it would, with the other steaks hitting the pan before nightfall. It was worth it, though. As seeing the mer radiate contentment as he dozed in his tub, had Clark too, feeling that same joy.

Chapter End Notes

Mystery, intrigue, steak; the hallmarks of any good chapter.

I had a lot of fun with this one! I love exploring Blue and Clark's weird lil relationship and also expanding on all the other folks in the story.

Anyway, as always, lemme know what you thought! Your comments and theories are everything to me, and honestly, I know it sounds bad, but I've only been writing as much as I have been recently to make sure you guys get your weekly dose of Salinity and I can get that sweet sweet serotonin from your comments =w=

I will catch you all next time! Take care all! :D x

Chapter 14

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

Whats this??? Another update?? So soon after the last one??

Well, that's cause today is my birthday! And to celebrate I wanted to post a update! I hope you all enjoy this chapter :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

June 22nd 2016

I really shouldn't have gotten the mer onto beef. Now, everytime we eat, without fail, he asks for it.

How does he ask for it, you might ask? The little shit kept my plate; the one he threw into the water. He must have found it after throwing it and now he keeps it under the jetty, and anytime I try and give him fish, he will scoot his ass outside, get the plate, come back in and tap it like an impatient customer at a restaurant.

~~I would be pissed if it wasn't actually sort of cute.~~ I need to try and get him to start liking some other stuff, 'cause if I keep buying beef at the rate he eats it, I'm going to go broke.

June 29th 2016

Alright, so I tried to feed it something else. Figured i'd try chicken cause that's pretty neutral. Went to Manton to get it as they have a pretty big chicken farm there and their prices for it weren't too bad. They also had beef, but fuck me if i'm paying those prices. Manton apparently charges the monetary equivalent of a first born child for their beef. I assume because it was blessed by God himself, or some shit.

Anyway, got back, cooked it, gave it to the mer, no problem, he ate it all.

Then he wanted more.

And then I realised I am a fucking idiot 'cause I just repeated the same fucking bullshit problem I had instead of fixing it.

Note to self: Next time, get him to like something you <u>don't</u> need to pay for.

July 2nd 2016

I don't even know where to start with today.

There had been a storm the night before.

Clark felt it brewing in the air even before the wind started. Could see the clouds swirling above as the waves start to roll in. Eventually the rain began and it not so much poured as whipped, swiping his face like blades to the point he could hardly see. Ordinarily he'd go inside before it got to that, hunker down in bed and ride out the weather with a good book, but he couldn't do that when he knew the mer was still out there.

He tried to call out to him, but his voice was lost in the wind almost immediately. He began to circle the island, walking along the shore and shouting out to the water in the hopes the mer would somehow hear him. It was as he looped the place for the fourth time, now drenched to the point he may as well be *in* the water, that the sharp cracks of thunder began.

But he heard it then, in and amongst the rumbles from the sky.

Screeching.

He all ran along the shore, ignoring the rain blinding him, the sand swallowing his feet. He kept going until the screeches grew louder, and only then did he stop and try to squint through the rain. He saw the mer, scrambling in the water as the forceful waves kept pulling him back in. A rip tide and a powerful one if the way the mer struggled to move through it was anything to go by. Clark however didn't have such troubles, wading up to his thighs in water and holding himself steady as the mer managed to inch his way closer. Clark held out his hand, yelling through the overwhelming sound. "Take it, I got you!"

The mer was pulled back once more in the current, but as the wave came crashing forward, he stretched out, his hand reaching for Clark. The moment Clark had it, he refused to let go, even as the swell of water tried to suck them both in. He tugged the mer from the water, scooping him into his arms and holding him tightly as he waded back to shore.

Even with the mer now in his arms, he still chose to run. He looked to the sky as he did, hoping they could beat the next snap of thunder, but almost in the same moment he thought it, Clark heard it overhead, and barely managed to turn his head in time to see the trees beside them get struck. He had no time to assess the damage, and kept moving, only stopping when they were both inside, the mer tucked safely in his tub and Clark splayed out on the floor beside him, panting.

Despite the walls around them, the sound of rain and wind was omnipresent, and Clark feared at any moment a gust or thunder would strike them. As the minutes ticked by though, his home remained untouched, and eventually Clark sat up, turning to the mer. He was safe. They both were.

When Clark looked at him, the mer chirped, reaching out and wiggling his fingers. Clark didn't know what he wanted, and when he tried to offer his hand, the mer shook his head, moving his hand out, closer to Clark's face instead. Clark held still and when he felt one of those claws run against his forehead, swiping away the hair there he let out a breath, which turned into a small huff of laughter. "Thank you." He muttered.

The mer trilled, maneuvering in the tub until he could bring his other hand to Clark's face as well. He gently scraped Clark's hair back from his face, and once that was done, didn't move them away. He kept his hands there, on either side of jaw.

Clark swallowed, having no choice but to look back at the mer, at those eyes. He could have sworn he didn't feel himself moving closer, yet the mers face slowly filling his vision made him realise he must have been. Before he knew it, he could feel the small puffs of breath against his lips, and for some reason, rather than move away, he parted his mouth, moving forward those remaining few inches.

Then the thunder struck again.

Clark jolted back, and in that moment came to the realisation of where he was and more importantly what had very nearly happened. He jumped up onto his feet and being that he couldn't go outside given the rain, nor stay in place given the mer, jumped into bed and rolled the blanket over himself, a jumble of words spilling from his mouth that he hoped would help excuse him. As he lay there, he wondered if he stayed still for long enough whatever went through his mind to cause that lapse of judgment would go.

Underneath his blanket fort, Clark watched the mer. At first he looked annoyed, his mouth opening as though ready to start screeching, but as the minutes ticked by, no sound came, instead he seemed to sigh and slip down into the water, until his gills and mouth were underneath. Only then did he close his eyes and fall asleep, and presumably, Clark was not that long behind as the next thing he knew it was morning.

The sun came in through the window, hitting him square in the eye and he got up and rubbed his face. He looked around blearily as the film of sleep over his eyes slowly abated, and it was then that he realised that the mer was no longer in his tub.

The door was slightly ajar and Clark frowned at it. Had it been the storm that knocked it open, or did the mer do it himself? After staring at the wood for longer than necessary, Clark got up, and slowly made his way over to it, and once there, pushed it fully open.

As he looked outside, Clark thought he was still sleeping

When he’d opened the door, something was blocking a good portion of the view. Something dark and unmoving. He had no idea what he was looking at, and almost put it up to his mind messing with him again, but no, soon the smell hit him, and once his eyes and nose were on board with what was before him definitely being in the realm of reality, he approached it wearily.

It was a sperm whale.

During the storm, as the waves rolled in and the thunder cracked, it must have ended up here, dead, or, at least that's what he first thought.

Then he heard the barest hint of a heart beat coming from within.

Clark's eyes blew wide as he stepped outside and approached the body. It wasn't moving, and looking at its bleek eyes, he realised his initial hypothesis was indeed correct, and yet, he could still hear it.

It was as he rounded the mass that he saw a jagged slit down its belly. He frowned at it and against his better judgement, brought his hand out to graze against the torn skin, the area where he heard the heartbeat emanate from.

Then he promptly had a heart attack as the mer stuck his head out.

" *Jesus!* " Clark yelped as he fell back into the sand, he stared up at the mer, covered in blood and looking alarmingly at ease for having emerged from the belly of a dead whale. His head quirked to the side as he regarded Clark before chirping and wiggling back inside.

"What, *no*-- " Clark scrambled up and went back to the opening. He stood there waiting for the mer to reemerge and when he did not, Clark gathered up what little he resolved he had this early in the morning, and using both hands, pulled apart the opening and tried to peek in through the mass of intestines. "Hey. Get your ass out here, or I swear to God I will drag you out myself."

He could hear movement from within, and Clark shuddered at the slippery sounds. Eventually he saw a face poking out once more. He was chewing now, his mouth full and Clark fought back a grimace. "Get out of there, you gremlin." He slapped the skin of the whale, above where the mer poked out. "Come on, get. You can't stay in there."

But the mer wasn't having any of it, he made a low series of calls and then dove back into the body. Clark wanted to say he expected the mer to listen to him, but really, he knew from the minute the little gremlin appeared from within that he was going to have to drag him out. "Alright, it's gonna be like that, huh?" Clark rolled up his sleeves, but when faced with the sheer size of the whale, opted to just take off his shirt instead. "I've helped birth calves, you ass. Getting you out ain't no different."

Clark pulled back the opening, and reached in. Thankfully the mer wasn't in too deep, apparently having not eaten that far ahead yet. Clark swallowed back the vomit threatening to come up as he thought about what he was doing, and surprisingly, imaging he was back in Smallville helped considerably. This wasn't a whale, it was a cow, and it wasn't a gremlin he was trying to pull out, it

was a calve. If he closed his eyes, he could swear he heard his father's voice. *'Alright, Clark. You just wanna find the hooves and--'*

Clark opened his eyes and smiled. "Gotcha."

He tugged hard and firm and with a wet plop the mer fell onto the sand. He was still holding onto a bit of intestine, and upon the interruption gave an indignant yelp, hissing at Clark when he tried to make him let go of the organ. "You don't need to be eating on this, let go." Clark tried to get it to let go again, but this time the mer turned around, curling into the sand where the furious sounds of chewing and swallowing resumed. "Alright, be like that…" Clark looked down at the mers back, his eyes trailing along the sleek lines of muscle, before resting on the arches of his hips. Clark stared at that part of him for longer than necessary, but eventually remembered what he was actually trying to do here.

He rested his hands on the mer's hips for a moment, before slipping his arms around his waist and in a quick burst of movement, lifted him up.

The mer let out what could only be described as a squawk as Clark carried him, inelegantly, inside his shack. In the movement, he let go of what he had been eating and began to swipe at Clark, and only when that failed, did the screaming start.

Clark ignored it and set him inside the cabin before running back out and slamming the door. He knew the mer was already climbing out of the tub to get back outside, so with no other thought in mind other than to get rid of the eyesore on his beach, he went to the whale, gripping its tail and flung it back out into the sea.

By the time the mer was scraping at the door, the beach was once again as it should be and Clark walked back to the cabin, opening the door with a faint smile.

The mer wiggled out, stopping abruptly in the doorway as his eyes went to the space the whale had been. He pointed there, chirping, and Clark swallowed a laugh at the apparent confusion on his face. "It musta swam off." Clark said evenly, shrugging a shoulder. The mer chirped and continued to make his way to the where the whale had been, and when he confirmed with all his senses that the whale was definitely no longer there, he slammed his hands into the sand and screeched at Clark, baring his teeth.

“Hey, don't give me that.” Clark said, rolling his eyes. “What? Did you want me to keep it here until you finished it? A whole ass rotting whale carcass?”

The mer squinted before nodding slowly.

Clark blew a raspberry. “I know you’re a little greedy guts but I think an entire whale is too much, even for you.”

The mer opened his mouth, presumably to retort, but simply batted his hand Clark’s way before falling onto his rear and crossing his arms. His pout back, and bigger than ever.

“Oh, come on.” Clark said, coming up to him and crouching down. “You had your fill, didn't you?” The mer still wasn’t looking at him, and Clark huffed, bringing his hand out to tap the mers ear until those bright eyes came back to him. “What if I cooked something nice to make it up to you?”

The mers face perked up at that, but Clark quickly shook his head. “Not steak, I don't have any left. You ate it all, remember?”

The pout returned.

Rolling his eyes, Clark got up. “Alright, be like that, but whilst you're moping you can at least clean yourself. You look like the inside of a jelly donut.” Clark pointed to the water and when the mer didn't move, Clark clapped his hands. “Go on, in the water and wash off.”

The mer's eyes narrowed as he pointed at Clark, more specifically at his arms and torso which were in a similar stare. Clark looked down at himself and nodded, reminding himself to breath from his mouth not his nose. “Yeah yeah, I’ll clean myself too, but you go in the sea.”

But the mer didn’t do that, instead he reached for Clark’s pant leg and tugged on it as he wiggled his way towards where the water lapped against the shore. Clark wanted to pull his leg free, but in the end didn't, he opted to humour the mer, getting all the way to the lapping water and only then stopping once it touched his feet. “Alright, i'm here. Now are you gonna go wash?”

The mer pointed at the water, then at Clark, and then nodded. Clark shook his head. “No, i'm not getting into the water.”

More nodding, and more chirping. He tugged on his pant leg even harder. Clark swallowed thickly, stepping back. “No, i'm not going into the water.” He looked away, ignoring the sudden ache in his stomach. “Now, go wash.” When the mer didn't move he ground his teeth. “ *Now.* ”

He didn't wait to see if the mer moved before walking away. He went around his cabin, going to the small water collection area he had set up around the back and of course after the storm last night, he had plenty of water to use. He picked up one of the tubs and walked further still. There was a break in the trees where he usually washed himself, and once there he set down the tub and peeked at the mer. He was rolling around in the shallows now and once Clark was sure of that, he stripped down fully, pulling his pants down and kicking them off to the side.

The rain water from last night had his hair clean, if a tad greasy, so he mostly worked the water over his arms and chest, and once he was sure he’d gotten the larger chunks and smeers off of whale guts off, he lifted the tub and dumped it over his head, letting the water flow all the way down his body.

He stood there for a moment, letting the water trickle down as the breeze touched him, and with his eyes still closed he stepped forward slightly, letting his head rest against the bark of the tree as he thought.

He knew he had to get some things straight in his mind, and this moment of solitude seemed the best time to do it. With the mer now taking up a larger portion of his life, things like last night were bound to happen. He had already resigned himself to dealing with the mer, but he hadn’t really come to terms with all the other feelings that brought along with it. The more time they spent together, the more Clark found himself thinking about him in quiet moments, like this.

He looked down at himself, more specifically at a part of his body that he thought had become obsolete long ago. His penis was however still very much a part of his body, and as such, as his mind swirled with thoughts he really wished it wouldn't harbour, he felt it stir despite how much he told himself that wasn't the case. “He's a mer.” He said through ground teeth. “You don't want to fuck the mer...”

Really? His mind said with a laugh. *Then why are you thinking about it right now?*

Clark groaned into the tree, screwing his eyes shut, but even then thoughts of the mer persisted. He thought of his body, how it had felt in his hands, those sounds he made. *His hips, don't forget his hips. You remember when he was on top of you? The way it felt as he rubbed against your cock?*

Clark did, and he bit his lip as his hand trailed up his thigh and took his cock in hand. He let out a quiet gasp. It had been so long since he'd done this, years even, and now, now he was doing it thoughts of the mer. He thought of his body, his face, those eyes watching him. He thought of last night, and what could have happened if he had just kept moving forward. He would have felt those lips on him, and Clark wondered if they were as soft as they looked. His hand moved faster as the thought of what face the mer would have made if they had kissed and before he knew it, he came.

A choked grunt was all that left him, but when it did, he finally cracked open his eyes, looking at the spot on the tree where evidence of his deed lay. He debated washing it away, but in the end didn't. In fact, he convinced himself that what was seeing was not actually semen, and what he had just done, did not actually happen and was all part of some elaborate fever dream.

Then he heard the chirp.

Clark whirled to the source and saw the mer near the tree line he had walked in from, watching him. Clark didn't move, didn't breath and figured what he was currently experiencing was a mental overload; there was so much that his brain had to deal with in this moment that it simply chose to not do any of it, and as such, Clark stood naked before the mer, his mouth falling open as words tried and failed to come out for far too long.

As the minutes ticked by, the mer's head tilted to the side and his eyes began to trail up and down Clark's body before resting on a specific part. As Clark remained still, he chirped again, batting his tail and only then did Clark get jump started into moving. "You--" he sputtered, his face and body thoroughly flushed. "Sneaking up on me; you shouldn't do that!" Clark yelled before reaching for his pants and pulling them on roughly.

If the mer was apologetic, it was lost on Clark as he kept his stare down and marched passed him. Once back inside the cabin, he was at a lose for what to do, so took the opportunity to go change the water in the mer's tub, and as he did, lingered at the shore line. As he stood staring at the water, he suddenly had ample time to deal with the whole new thoughts plaguing him.

He saw, he definitely saw. He swallowed thickly and took a deep breath. *So he saw you jerking off? What's the big deal? Just pretend it didn't happen, and move on.*

~~*The big deal is that you touched yourself thinking of a mer. A mer. I see you really have forgone humanity in more ways than one out here. I wish I could get Diana to come and slap you.*~~

Clark's mouth fell open, as his breathing grew laboured. *Don't do this, you know I wouldn't have done it if--*

~~*If what? Please, you were waiting for this. From the minute you found that thing, you've wanted to fuck it.*~~

"Please don't..." he let out, falling into the sand and staring at the damp ground. "I didn't mean, it was just--"

But he didn't carry on. He was unable to as his vision began to swim. He closed his eyes and tried to get himself back under control. This was fine, he tried to tell himself. Touching himself was fine. That didn't cross a bridge he couldn't come back from. He was sure plenty of people touched themselves to mers, he was perfectly normal for that.

It was all the other stuff Clark did that was questionable.

Eventually, the mer found him by the water. He came up beside him, and despite how much Clark told himself he wanted the mer to continue past him into the water and never return, he all but melted into the touch when he felt the mer's hand rested on his back.

~~*Don't. Don't do this to yourself. You're falling deeper and deeper and soon even I won't be able to stop you.*~~

Clark heard the voice, agreed with it even, and yet, still chose to fall back onto his rear next to the mer. He turned to him, leaning into his touch. "I'm... sorry for yelling..." He muttered. "You just surprised me." When the mer leant in close, rubbing his check on Clark's shoulders, he simply took a deep breath, resigning himself to what he was feeling. This was his new normal, now. For better or for worse.

Chapter End Notes

(°ʖ°)

We're getting there, lads. Clark's cracking. Not long till smooches.

Anyway! Like I said today is my birthday, and I decided much like when you used to bring in candy for your classmates in school on your birthday, I would post another update ;D

I hope to still post my normal update on Thurs, but I may to it on Fri this week. We shall see (I have yet to actually write it yet... But I am hopeful XD)

Anyway, as always lemme know your thoughts!! I love reading them <3 Have a nice day, yall! Until next time :D

Chapter 15

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 7th 2016

So the mer has abandoned his spot under the jetty and has now taken to spending his days lounging around inside the whale, which is not something I even remotely considered when I threw it back in the water but we are where we are.

I mean, it's good in a way. He isn't bothering me as much during the day anymore. It's like, I take him outside, he swims, eats his fill of the whale, lounges around inside of its rotting guts for a while and when he tries to come back inside, I force him to wash himself thoroughly before carrying him back in. Rinse repeat.

All that? Fine. No problem. What isn't fine, though, is that he's started smuggling whale meat to bed every night. I wouldn't mind if it didn't stink something awful, so, when I find it in his tub, I'd throw it out. A completely normal response to finding rotting flesh in one's home, right?

Then the fucker tried to hide a chunk in my bed.

Making him sleep outside for that. Little shit.

July 8th 2016

So last night was something.

After I kicked the mer out, he sat by the door and scratched at it for an hour. An hour . It was maddening, just this constant scrape scrape scrape. I finally broke and opened the door to let him in, but he didn't come inside, no, the fucker harrumphed and then went back into the water.

I was shocked. The little shit actually spent the time and energy scraping at my door, but the minute I opened it-- the moment I gave in-- he went 'nah, fuck you' and went back into the water.

I can't even be mad. If anything I'm impressed. That is a level of pettiness I thought only I was capable of.

July 10th 2016

I had a visitor today.

When the sun rose, Clark woke, got himself dressed, and carried the mer out to sea. He dumped him the water and watched as the mer swam furiously to his whale, and after scaring away the few sharks that had been feeding on it, dove into the cavern he had carved for himself in its stomach.

Clark grimaced as he watched on, but there was a plus side to the mers new found hobby of whale spelunking. With him occupied, it left Clark with plenty of time to do his chores without having to deal with a needy mer interrupting him, and that was exactly what he planned on doing on this particular day.

But before he could even step off the jetty, the mer was already swimming back up to him. He came

out of the water, and chirped, pointing furiously out towards the horizon.

Clark frowned, but didn't try to ask for clarification. He simply crouched and followed the line of the mer's finger to where it landed along the horizon. It was then that he saw what he was pointing at. It was a boat and by the looks of it, it was heading straight for his island.

Clark stood back up and debated what to do. If a fisherman was coming towards his island it was usually the result of a run in with mers, and they were in need of medical or mechanical aid. But as Clark focused on the boat, he realised there was only one occupant and they didn't appear to be in any danger. In fact, as Clark focused he found the heartbeat sounded familiar and after a few moments he realised why.

He crouched down once more, and brought his hand out to the mer, poking him on the forehead. "Best behaviour, alright? We have company."

As the boat came closer, Clark waved to it, and from the inside, Marcos waved back.

By the time the boat had reached them, the mer had decided to come out of the water fully. Now reclining along the sand as the boat moored on the other side of the jetty from Clark's. Once the engine was off, Marcos hopped from it with a grin. "Hey, Clark!"

"Marcos." Clark said with a bob of the head. He looked the boat over. Part of why it had taken him longer to recognize it was due to how different it looked. In place of the rusted hull was an exterior painted in bright red, and a cockpit lined with fresh fiberglass. "Your boat's lookin' good, barely recognized it."

"Thanks!" He said, slapping the side with a fond sigh. "Me and dad have been working on it a whole bunch. New engine, reinforced hull, and a fresh coat of paint. She's practically good as new."

"I'll say." Clark walked down along the jetty towards his house. Marcos followed after him. "Mers give you any trouble on the way?"

"Not really." Marcos said with a small shrug. "Few when I first left, but around here not so much. Noticed a whole bunch of sharks that way, though--" Marcos turned and pointed to where Clark knew the whale carcass resided. With the mer now on land, the sharks had resumed their earlier feeding.

“Fair enough.” He said, and once on the sand, the mer finally moved from his spot, approaching them carefully and stopping a few feet away. “I will say I was a little surprised to see you.”

“Oh.” Marcos said, rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah, I would have called ahead to let you know I was coming, but I realised I didn't have your number, so I figured I'd just take my chances as I didn’t know when I was going to get another opportunity to drop by.”

Clark frowned. “What do you mean by that?”

“Well, my dads gone to Redding for a hospital appointment, and he doesn’t like leaving me in charge of the store if he’s not there, so we’re closed for the day. Usually when we’re closed I just play video games all day, but I wanted to come see your island, so I figured this was the perfect opportunity to.”

“I see.” Clark said, titling his head to the side. “Hope you’re dad's okay. Anything serious?”

Marcos gave a squirrely shrug of the shoulders, looking away. “He just needs to get some x-rays, that’s all.”

“Well, that’s not too bad, then.” Clark said with a nod.

“Yeah.” Marcos said with a smile, but Clark could see it didn’t quite reach the eyes. He didn’t push the issue though, especially as the mer chose this moment to crawl even closer, now sitting on Clark’s feet and staring up at the two of them.

“I see your mer's not mad at you anymore.” Marcos said with a laugh, which quickly turned into a gasp when the mer started hissing.

“Hey.” Clark batted the mers head with his palm. “Don’t be rude.”

Marcos gave a nervous laugh, waving his hand. “It’s okay. I'm sure he’s just territorial.”

“Yeah, well, this is my island, so I decide who can and can't visit. Not him.” Clark looked down at the mer, and when he sent a pout his way, Clark simply rolled his eyes. “I told you, don't be rude.”

The mer grumbled, but otherwise didn’t make any sounds, hissing or otherwise as Marcos and Clark made their way inside the cabin. Once at the doorway, Clark turned to the mer once more. “You coming in or are you gonna sit out there and pout?”

The mer answered that question by remaining still, and pouting.

Clark rolled his eyes and slid the tub underneath the bed, before gesturing for Marcos to take the seat at the desk whilst he fell into his arm chair. “You want a drink or anything?” He asked.

“Sure, what you got?”

Clark leant forward off his chair and looked under his bed. Beside the metal tub, sat a six pack of beer. He pursed his lips. “Uh, beer.”

“Oh.” Marcos said. “No thanks.”

“Not a fan?” Clark asked, taking one for himself. He seldom drank, but with company it seemed acceptable. All alone on his island, it just felt depressing.

“Well, i'm not twenty one yet, so…”

Clark stilled, his hand hovering over the cap of his beer. “...How old are you?”

Marcos looked away, a faint blush on his cheeks. “I'll be twenty in august.”

“You’re *nineteen* .” Clark blurted

“Well, yeah." Marcos said and upon seeing Clark’s expression, smiled, leaning back in his chair. “Wait, how old did you think I was?”

“An adult, at least. God, you still have the word *‘teen’* in your age. What the Hell are you hanging out with me for?”

“You’re cool.” He shrugged, looking down at his hands. “And you don’t treat me like a kid.”

“Because I didn't realise you *were* one...” Clark grumbled into his beer. “Right, so no beer. I got… uh.” He took a sip. “Water?”

“Yeah, water's okay.” Marcos said with a shy nod. “Although I do have cola in my boat. I could go grab it?”

Clark pressed his lips together. “Yeah, you might wanna go do that then, ‘cause when I said water, I meant the stuff I have collected in tubs outside and I don't know if it's potable for humans.”

Clark didn’t need to say anything else for Marcos to get up and head to his boat. Once he’d returned, bringing with him his own six pack of the non alcoholic sort. He opened one of the few cans that remained in the holder and sipped at it.

He remained standing for a moment, walking a small loop around the room and taking in the interior of the place. He stopped at the few trinkets that Clark had lying around; the map over his bed, the small collection of seashells on his desk, the lone photo frame next to them, and then went back to his seat, sitting down with a sigh. “This place is nice.” He said, still looking around.

Clark pressed his lips together. “You’re being polite, which I won't lie, I appreciate, but you can say it’s a shit hole.”

Marcos laughed. “No, I mean it. It's cozy.”

Clark took a sip of his beer. Diana's words coming back to mind. “Others aren't as inclined to agree.”

“Well, I mean, I get that.” Marcos said as he looked down at his can. “When I was sailing in I thought this island looked beautiful. Sand, trees, and sun. If I lived out here and I could afford to, I'd have built myself a giant mansion or something.”

“Right, I am sort of broke, so…” Clark looked around at the wooden walls and floors. “Shack will have to do.”

“You’re broke?" Marcos tilted his head. “But what about… your... You know.”

Clark pursed his lips. “You're going to have to elaborate.”

“Well, you were Superman.” When Clark’s face remained blank, Marcos went on. “Doesn’t being a superhero pay well?”

Clark let out a laugh, that quickly devolved into a fit, one that had him hunched over and aching as the seconds ticked by. When he finally sat up, his eyes were tearing and he had to wipe them away. “Oh, good one.”

“I'll take that as a no then...” Marcos muttered into his cola. After a few moments, he looked up at Clark through his lashes. “Anyway, this place is still nice. It's like, you got everything you need all in the comfort of one room, well, everything apart from a bathroom.”

“Oh yeah, I have an outhouse out back, and have tubs I wash with.” Clark said. Marcos nodded at that, opting to not say anything. But Clark didn’t miss the redness on his cheeks. He raised a brow at Marcos. “You need to pee?”

“What!” Marcos jolted, though that indigent shock quickly devolved into quiet acceptance. “Yeah… I drank a lot of cola on the way here.”

Clark just shrugged. “I’d probably say just go in the trees somewhere. The outhouse is rather pungent this time of year.”

“Yeah?” Marcos asked, setting his can down. “I won't be a sec.” He rushed from the cabin, and Clark could hear his retreating footsteps going towards the trees. He looked out the open door and spied the mer still sitting on the beach, watching him.

He got up, and approached the doorway, leaning against it, he called out. “You still being a little sour puss?”

The mers response was a single bat of the tail against the sand. Clark approached him, taking another sip of his beer. “You could go sit in your whale, you know. Don't need to stay here if you’re gonna be grumpy the whole time.”

But Clark knew he wasn’t going to do that. He happened to agree with Marcos’ sentiment. The mer was territorial, and most likely wasn’t going to go anywhere whilst Marcos was still here. Clark crouched down until he was eye level with the mer, and nodded. “Alright, stay here but at least go in the water. You'll shrivel up if you sit in the sun all day.”

With a grumble, the mer conceded, not going far by any means as he swam just under the jetty, his eyes poking out above the surface. Clark simply waved at him before standing back up and looking out towards the trees. “What’s taking him?” He muttered to himself.

He went towards where he knew Marcos went; where he heard his heartbeat coming from. As he walked through the dense smattering of trees, he realised just where he was hearing Marcos was. As the realization dawned on him, his pace became quicker, and when he bumped his arm on one of the trees he past, his beer went flying. He didn't care though, he just kept moving. He was running now, stepping over the dense roots and leaves under foot until he broke out into the clearing. There were flowers all around, and Marcos stood right in the middle of them all.

Marcos hadn't noticed he wasn't alone, still staring at the floor. Clark ran up to him, grabbing his shoulders and turning him brusquely. “What are you doing here?”

“I was just--” he pointed down at the wooden plaques on the floor and Clark saw red.

“Did you *piss* here?”

Marcos balked. “ *What?* No.” He sputtered, as sweat started to collect on his forehead. “I went over there, but then I saw all these flowers and I came to look.” His eyes darted to the plaques again, before going back to Clark. “Who are Lois and--”

“Stop. *Talking* .” Clark ground out. “You shouldn’t be here. You need to leave. Now.”

“But--”

“Now!” Clark yelled. Marcos let out a choked cry before running, not bothering to avoid the flowers as he made a beeline straight for where Clark's cabin lay. As the seconds ticked by, Clark felt his anger ebate, only to be replaced with a soul crushing sense of guilt. Marcos was just curious, and Clark snapped at him like he was guilty of an even greater crime. He took a deep breath, trying to get himself under control. His hands shook and with each second he could feel the guilt growing.

~~*Screaming at a child? God, what has happened to you? I don’t even think I recognize you anymore.*~~

No. No, I didn’t--

Clark took off, flying high about the island. He spotted Marcos running across the sand towards his boat and flew to him, landing just in front. Marcos stumbled backwards, landing on his rear and looking up to Clark, his eyes filled with tears.

“Marcos, I--”

“I’m sorry.” Marcos’ blurted as he crawled backwards along the sand. “I didn’t mean to--”

“No, *no.* ” Clark brought his hands out, stepping back. “God, you shouldn't be apologizing. *I’m* the one who's sorry. I overreacted. I know I did, and you didn’t deserve that. It’s just…” he lowered his hands, taking a deep breath. “You went somewhere very private, and I just...” Clark turned back around, lowering his hands. “Panicked.”

Marcos’ still looked terrified, but slowly, on shaky legs, he stood up and eyed Clark. “Why, though? Who… Who’s buried there?”

Clark could feel his stomach churn. He wanted to fly away; wanted to be anywhere but here. He looked at the sand, at the thousands of individual grains and wanted to count each and everyone of them if it meant avoiding the answer to that question. In the end he looked up, his eyes growing damp. “My wife, and--” but he couldn't finish the sentence, as the tears began to fall. “I'm sorry, I just need a minute to...” He didn’t finish, as he walked away, down along the beach.

He kept walking. Occupying his mind with other thoughts to try and keep the ones that threatened to ravage his mind buried. He stared at the clouds, at the steaks of sunlight, and when he felt his legs couldn't take him any further, he fell into the sand, his eyes still glued to that spot along the horizon.

He half expected Marcos to leave and never return. He wouldn't have been surprised. It would be fitting for him to lose someone just like he lost Diana. But as the minutes ticked by and those clouds he stared at drifted further and further, he heard the sound of shifting sand, and then there was somebody sitting down beside him.

“I’m sorry.” Marcos said. Clark opened his mouth, ready to repeat everything he had said before, but before he could, Marcos held up his hand. “I'm not talking about what happened back there. I meant, I'm sorry for your loss. I know it must be hard losing someone.”

Clark shook his head. “You shouldn't even be sorry about that. You don't owe me any apologies. I acted like a monster.”

Marcos brought his knees up and rested his head on them. “You acted human. It's normal to be upset when someone intruders on something private.”

“Yeah, well i'm not human. I shouldn't have let my anger get the better of me and for that, I am sorry. You didn't know. You were just curious.”

Marcos nodded at that, letting out a long sigh. “Yeah, I was. I guess I was wondering who those people were. I mean, I didn't know Superman had a wife.”

“You know I didn’t live my entire life as Superman, right?” Clark asked, turning his head by the barest fraction. “I did have a secret identity. Which is now just..." He pressed his lips together. "My identity.”

“So you like, lived amongst the people of Metropolis?” Marcos asked. “Why would you wanna do that when you could fly around the world and just do whatever you wanted?”

Clark smiled at that. “That *was* what I wanted. Being Superman was just part of my life. If anything I’m more Clark then I ever was Kal. I was raised on earth, lived on a ranch with my parents till I was your age. Then I moved to Metropolis and became a journalist.”

Marcos made a face. “A journalist? Why a journalist?”

“Why not?” Clark said with a smile. “For one, I could interview Superman whenever I wanted. Plus having super powers made other aspects of the job easier, too.”

“Huh, I didn't think about that.” Marcos said, bumping his shoulder against Clark’s. “Bet that made your coworkers jealous.”

“Oh, it did.” Clark mused, closing his eyes. If he focused, he could see the office as he last remembered seeing it; Jimmy at his desk, Perry in his office, Lois across from him. It was like he was right back there. “It was actually how me and my wife started dating. She was always suspicious of me, and didn’t understand how I kept getting all these exclusives. So one day she came to my desk, ready to grill me. We spoke for a little while, I used some of the ole Kent charm, and ended up asking her out to dinner.” He smiled. “She said yes.”

Marcos gave a small smile. “I bet she was pretty.”

“Oh, she was beautiful.” Clark murmured. “You should have seen her on our wedding day. She looked like an angel.”

“How did she…” Marcos began, before trailing off. “Never mind, you don’t need to tell me.”

He winced. It still hurt having to remind himself of that day. He almost didn't respond, but he felt like he owed it to Marcos to help him understand what he had seen. “The Metropolis quake. We were at work when it hit. When the first quake hit us, our office stayed standing at first, so I took off and flew around the city. Saved as many as I could, but then the tsunami came. Our office was damaged worse than I thought by the quakes and it started to collapse in the water. By the time I found Lois, she was clinging onto the edge of a wall, and a mer--” Clark swallowed, taking a deep breath. “A mer was pulling at her feet. Trying to drag her into the water. I used my laser vision and killed him. But before I could get to Lois, she lost her grip and she--” Clark could feel his eyes burn with tears. “She fell in.”

It was the single moment of Clark’s life that he wished he could turn back time to prevent. All he needed was a second. One second to swoop in and catch Lois before she hit the water; before she hit the concrete just underneath the surface. Clark could still hear the sound of her neck breaking, the choked sound of her last breath leaving her. As the moment replayed itself in his mind, it stopped feeling real. It was just a movie he was watching, one that just kept going and going, and no matter what he did, couldn’t be rewound.

As he sat there it was almost as though he could feel the sand beneath him change, as though the world itself was changing back to how it was on that day. Water and debris everywhere, the sound of thousands screaming, and Lois falling to the water.

“I picked her up, and I ended up flying away. People were still dying, screaming for help and I just… left them all. Even though she was dead I felt compelled to get her away from there. I needed to get her somewhere safe, so I just kept flying and flying and before I knew it…” he looked up at the sky. “I ended up here.”

He had almost forgotten Marcos was sat there beside him but then he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder. When he turned to it he saw Marcos’ hand there. “I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine what that's like.” He said, taking a deep breath. “I lost my mom to a quake. I was a baby when it happened though, but my dad still remembers it. Says the waves came in and mom got swept out. Mers went for her and that was it. She was gone.”

“Jesus.” Clark muttered. “I’m sorry.”

Marcos shrugged a shoulder, letting his hand fall back to the sand. “That's the thing though, I don't remember her at all. I see pictures of her around the house and everything, but like, it's hard to mourn someone you never met. Even though she was my mom, it's like, I didn't know her. My dad though, he hasn’t forgotten. It’s why he hates the mers. In his mind, if it hadn’t have been for them, my mom might have survived that day, but instead…”

“Yeah, I can imagine.” Clark said with a shallow nod. “I hated them for a long time, too. Still do, really.”

Marcos smiled. “Your mer’s the exception?”

“I--" Clark pressed his lips together, before letting out a long sigh. “I don’t even know anymore. I hated him at first, and he’s still a little shit, but… It’s like, we understand each other.”

“That's fair enough.” Marcos said, nodding. “It’s like they say. You can’t help who you fall in love with.”

Clark sputtered at that. “I don't *love* him. I told you, I'm *not* a merner. I just--” he swallowed, forcing down the redness in his cheeks. “We’re just... close.”

One look at Marcos’ face told him he was not at all convinced, but thankfully he didn't push the matter opting instead to just shrug. “Fair enough, it's still good though that you have someone out here. Must have gotten lonely before he showed up.”

It was strange. Clark could barely even remember the time before the mer. He wondered how he did manage being alone, but following that train of thought only brought back hazy memories of his first years on the island. It was a wash of sleeping and writing, punctuated only occasionally with trips to Cottonwood and it seemed so much more dull when compared to his life now. The mer for better or for worse is part of why Clark could get up every morning, and doesn't just wile away the time in bed anymore. It was something that Clark would always be thankful for, though he wasn’t going to tell the mer that.

Marcos stood up then, brushing the sand from his pants. “I should head home. Dads hospital appointment will be over soon, and I don't want him getting back before me and wondering where I've been.”

“That's fair enough.” Clark said, getting up to join him. “I'll walk you back.”

After the short walk back to the jetty, Marcos turned to him. “Thanks for having me Clark.”

“Yeah… I'm sorry it was so bad. I'll make it up to you next time.”

“Seriously, don't worry about it." Marcos said, waving his hand. “I won't lie, I was terrified of you for a little while there, but I get it, and I forgive you.” Marcos looked down at the sand, and kicked it with his foot. “I also wanted to say… it’s probably gonna sound stupid, but… I think Lois would be proud of you for today.”

“Huh?”

“Okay, well it's like..." He made a face, frowning in thought. "My dad always said ‘mama would be proud’ a lot when I was growing up. Sometimes, it would be for things like when I graduated high school, but sometimes it would be for the smallest things. I did my homework? Mama would be proud. I cleaned my room? Mama would be proud.” He gave a small smile. “I never got it at first, i’d always be like, ‘aren't you proud, too?’ but it was like, I knew he was proud but hearing him say that about my mom, it helped make her feel closer to me. Like, she was there and she really was proud of me for just living my life, even if she wasn’t there to see it.”

“Anyway, I'm sure Lois is proud of you, too. Talking about that day must have been hard for you to do and I'm sure she’s proud of you for doing it. Heck, I’m sure whatever it is you do every day, no matter how big or small, she’d be proud of you for doing. 'Cause moving on with life after you’ve lost someone important to you, is hard, and the fact that you’re here, now, living your life is an accomplishment.”

When Marcos grew quiet, Clark wanted to speak but he found no words. *Would she be proud of me?* He asked himself. He didn't know, but imagining she was filled him with a warmth he hadn't felt in

along time. He tried to say something to Marcos, anything, but nothing came. He managed to let out a shaky breath, as he felt tears slid down his cheeks.

Marcos smiled at him, before glancing at his watch. “Now, I really better get going.” He ran up the jetty and hopped onto his boat. “Thanks again for having me. See you!”

Clark lifted his hand and waved, being that that was all he was capable of in that moment. He watched as Marcos pulled away, and went on back towards Cottonwood. It was only when his boat disappeared along the horizon, that Clark fell to the sand one more. He brought his hands to his face, feeling the damp skin of his cheeks.

He sat there, lost in thought, until he heard a chirp. When he looked up, the mer was watching him, his eyes still half closed with sleep. Clark smiled, wiping his eyes and nose with his shirt. “Did you fall asleep?” He asked. “What happened to being on guard, huh?”

The mer blew a few bubbles in the water to that, and swam the short distance to shore,before shimmying the rest of the way across the sand to Clark. He reclined next to him, his hand reaching for Clark’s knee. Clark brought his own hand to it and rested it on top. “Well, I don't know about you, but I think that's me done for the day.” He said, still looking at the water. “I think I’m just gonna take it easy. You wanna come inside or you gonna go to your whale now?”

The mer thought for a moment before leaning onto Clark and wrapping his arms around his neck. Clark laughed at that before bringing his hands to the mers hips. “Got it.” He muttered, before lifting the mer easily and heading back inside.

As he lay in bed, the beginnings of sleep coming over him, he thought of Marcos' word again. He didn’t know if what he'd said was true, but he couldn’t deny he wanted to believe it was. He really did.

Chapter End Notes

And part of why this Clark is an emotional mess is revealed. Who knows what other secrets will come to light? (°ʖ°)

Also can we just appreciate that Marcos saw graves on Clark's island, and his first thought wasn't 'this man is a serial killer' and was instead 'he must have lost someone important.' His innocence

coming through right there, 'cause ngl if that were me I would have started running XD

Also Blue being a lil cutie as always, ngl, him scraping at the door and going back into the water is my favourite thing he has done in this fic, and I can just imagine the incredulous look on Clark's face as he watches him go XD

Anyway, as always I hope you liked this chapter! Please let me know your thoughts and as always I will see you all next time! Take care, all! :D

Chapter 16

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 13th 2016

So it turns out the sharks that have been feeding on the whale had enough of the mer chasing them of. He got bit today.

He was all pissy at me as I was wrapping up the bite, and I think it's 'cause in his mind, I am the cause of his misfortune due to me throwing the whale out there in the first place.

Still, no amount of shark bites or moping can convince me that keeping an 80 tonne mass of rotting meat in front of my house is a good idea.

But given he got bitten and lost his whale, i'm gonna dip into my savings and get him some chicken from Manton. Hopefully that will perk him up.

July 14th 2016

Note to self: cook chicken thoroughly

For the love of God, a mer with food poisoning is a level of Hell I did not foresee.

July 17th 2016

The mer is feeling better. Less puke which is always a plus sign.

I caved and bought him a steak. I think he deserves it given the Hell he's going through. Well, that I am technically putting him through.

I feel awful about it. Honestly I forget not everyone has a cast iron stomach like I do, but still, I figured 'he eats rotting whale meat, pink chicken won't be that bad for him, right?' God, I want to go back and slap past me for causing this shit show, but we are where we are, and now I'm just hoping the minute all the puking stops and I give him the steak, he will stop giving me the death stare. Which, I know I deserve, but still.

July 20th 2016

He's okay now. Still a little weak, but that's understandable. What I didn't expect was how much weight he lost. I know he didn't eat much, if anything, for a whole week, but still, I can see his ribs now and his face is all gaunt.

He didn't want the steak, though. When I cooked it up and tried to give it to him, he just looked like he was going to be sick again.

I know I said I wanted him off of beef, but I had hoped there would be a way I could have achieved that without mentally scaring him. In the end, I just passed him my cooler. It had a lot in there from the last time I went out fishing, and I figured he'd just eat a few and be done, but nope, he ate the whole cooler. I can't even be mad though, I mean, I did do this to him, so what if I have to do a little extra fishing from now on.

July 27th 2016

Whatever sympathy I had, is now gone.

“You little shit.” Clark yelled as he ran out of his cabin towards the shore. “Are you *kidding* me?”

When Clark had woken up that morning, he thought it would be like any of the others prior. The mer was a lot better now, even able to get out of the tub of his own volition again. He of course didn't, still preferring to be carried to and from the water as though Clark had nothing better to do with his time.

It was with this thought in mind that Clark debated carrying him out to the ocean before getting himself ready for the day. That was what he usually did after all, but with the mer sick their usual routine had changed somewhat. In the end he didn’t; the mer still looked to be sleeping, so Clark left him for now and went outside.

After using the outhouse, he lifted his shirt to his nose. When the smell that confronted his senses was potent, even for his lowered standards, he pulled it off and went to the tubs of rain water.

Given it was summer, the weather was growing even warmer and temperamental, which was most likely why he smelt like a freshly cut onion this morning. Ordinarily he wouldn’t wash when the rain water started to dwindle, even if his stretch was verging on eye watering, but he planned on going to Cottonwood in a week anyway, and a large tub could last him if he was careful, so he ended up taking the smallest tub that he had and headed for the trees.

As he pulled off the rest of his clothing, he cast a quick eye towards the cabin. The mer was still in his tub, and Clark looked down at his body and took a deep breath. There was another reason he was washing himself more frequently. He’d found it was the one time of day where he could be alone with his thoughts and deal with what resulted when those thoughts ventured into illicit territories, as being in or near the cabin meant being with or near the mer, especially with him being stuck inside for the past few weeks.

Seeing him sick was definitely not fuel for these thoughts in the slightest. If anything it had Clark reevaluating every single decision he had ever made regarding the mer, but it was the moments in between those horrors that had Clark’s mind running wild and his hand reaching for his cock.

For one, the mer didn’t sleep in the tub whilst he was sick. Clark let him sleep in the bed, as keeping him flat was better for his stomach and Clark could then use the tub as a makeshift bucket for the mer to unload his already empty stomach into. It was during this time that Clark also learnt that seaweed worked its magic inside the body of a mer as well as outside, as it was the only thing the mer could bring himself to eat whilst sick.

So it was during this time, as they lay in bed together at night, despite how much Clark would try to keep his distance, that the mer would find him, curl up against him and press his hips right against his crotch.

If he didn't know better, he would almost think it was on purpose. Instead Clark told himself it was because the mer was sick. He assumed if he were ever sick, he’d want the comfort of being close to someone, too. So even when the thoughts of sleeping in his boat came to mind, he stayed put. And he couldn’t deny, he had his own selfish reasons for letting the mer sleep with him. At the end of the day, it felt nice having someone there beside him again.

It also wasn’t as bad at first. The mer often tossed and turned and of course emptied his stomach into the tub during most nights, so his arousal was soon put to bed. But it was as the mer got better and started to press in closer to Clark, sometimes even turning to face him and letting his head rest in the space right underneath his jaw that the issues started to arise.

Sleeping was practically impossible with the mer so close, as if he wasn’t up due to concern over the mers health, it was due his cock getting some very mixed messages from the warm body pressed up against it. It was a strange torture to bare; a mer rubbing against his groin as it alternated between arousing and horrifying him.

It was when the arousal overwhelmed him to the point he knew he had to do something about it, that he’d go and wash himself, and given the mer was bed bound, he also had the benefit of not having to worry about being snuck up on again.

It was with this knowledge that Clark began to wash himself, his mind filling with thoughts of the night before. The mer moving in his sleep against him, rubbing his hips against his cock until it strained in his boxers. He made noises in his sleep, soft chirps that sounded like they could be words if Clark tricked himself into believing them to be. As he stroked his cock, he bit his lip as he thought about what the mer felt like. He wanted to know how he tasted, and the worst part was that each flick of his wrist, he felt his resolve crumble. It was as though even he knew it was a matter of time before he would succumb to the inevitable.

He came, and as the haze of arousal left him, he was better able to get a hold of himself. He'd gotten it out of his system, what ever 'it' actually was. Now he was able to withstand whatever temptations lay before him. He had to remind himself that this is what mers did, that thoughts were okay so long as he never let it get beyond that. He had to be strong.

Which, ironically was far easier given that in this exact moment he was filled with nothing but rage.

As he had walked back from washing, he pulled on his old boxers, and made his way back inside, intent on changing into new clothes once there. He definitely needed to do laundry, but he still had some shirts and boxers that were clean enough to last him until his next trip, or so he thought.

On his way back to his cabin, he spotted the mer at the shore lounging beside a mound of sand, but thought nothing of it. He had managed to get himself out of the tub, which was something, and Clark didn’t have to worry about doing it himself which was nice. He then made his way inside and only paused when he pulled open his dresser drawer, and found it empty.

Clark knew he still had clean clothes, he had seen them only the night before, but what was more baffling was when he tried to look into his hamper to see if maybe he was incorrect about having anything left clean, he found it missing as well.

It was then that he realised that the lump next to the mer was not infact sand.

After scrawling a hasty sentence in his journal, he ran from the cabin, yelling out to the mer. But by the time Clark reached him, it was too late. His clothes were drenched and he could see a few floating off in the waves. He was dumbfounded; struggling to come to terms with the fact that the mer, having only recently regained a portion of his mobility, managed to carry all of his clothes into the water and dump them, only to then sit beside the damp mound, grinning.

“Did you throw my clothes into the water?” Clark ground out, despite seeing with his own eyes the answer to his question.

He didn’t expect the mer to look apologetic, but it was rather striking to see just how little regret for his actions he had as he lounged on his side, using his tail to further push Clark’s clothes into the water.

“Stop it, you little--” Clark rushed to the pile, throwing pieces from it back onto the dry sand. They

were drenched already, but beyond the few pieces he was able to scoop up from the shallow waves, were pieces of white fabric floating even further than the rest, far out at sea. Clark squinted at them, and when he noticed what they were, he turned to the mer, his voice cold as ice. “You threw my underwear in there, too?”

The mers grin grew.

“You mother fucker--” Clark lunged for him, though his brain had apparently not thought to do anything beyond that action and as such, he ended up on top of the mer, looming over him without any other thoughts appearing in his mind to guide him.

The look in the mers eyes was mischievous, and it was then that Clark’s anger started to dwindle, though not by much as the sheer ridiculousness of the situation kept stoking the flames back to life. “*Why* would you do that?” He asked, using every ounce of his being to keep his voice even.

The mer’s ears twitched, and Clark felt his anger flair as he rolled his eyes at the question. But soon after, the mer gave a series of long and short chirps, punctuated with gestures out to sea, then he lay one of his hands on his stomach and rubbed it. When Clark didn’t speak, the mer let out a frustrated sigh and repeated the chirps again, louder and faster, but he didn’t need to. Clark pulled back onto his rear. Understanding dawning on him. “You’re mad about the chicken." He said softly. "‘Cause it made you sick.”

The mer made a face and gave a single shallow nod, as though the answer was right, but only partially. Clark had to assume there was more behind the mers actions and gestures, but for now, he counted himself lucky he gathered as much as he did. He gave a beleaguered sigh. “Alright, well, i’m sorry for that. I should have been more careful, and I can understand why you’d be mad because you weren't feeling well, but--” Clark huffed. “You didn't have to throw my clothes out to sea!”

The mer however, only shrugged. He pushed himself up on his arm, and brought his other hand to the waistband of Clark’s underwear.

The sudden shift had Clark drawing a blank, and he could practically feel the blood rushing to his face. “What are you doing?”

The mer tucked a claw around the waistband, and let the weight of his hand slowly pull it down. Clark was frozen. It was as though his mind had abandoned him and in an instant, Clark forgot how to breath, how to move, how to do anything to even attempt to prevent what was currently happening.

Then the mer paused. The band was low now, and Clark could see the hair down there come into view. He knew it wouldn't be much longer until another part of himself would be on show, but for the time being, the mer didn't seem curious to see it-- again. He let go of the band, and fell back against the sand. Despite Clark thinking if the mer were to stop he'd regain control of his faculties, that didn't happen. He remained rooted in place.

He remained where he was, over the mer, and slowly that mischievous look on his face was gone, replaced with one of quiet sadness. He looked away then, out to the water, and apparently that was all it took for Clark to start moving.

He stood up and looked down at the mer. There were a multitude of things he wanted to say, but in the moment all that came out of his mouth was a husky; "You're going to go get my underwear now." When the mer didn't move, Clark prodded him with his foot. "Hey. You had your fun. Now go get them back, or you're sleeping out here for a month."

Begrudgingly, the mer went to the water. Though not in his usual crawl, instead choosing to roll lengthwise across the sand, grumbling all the while. Once in the water, he righted himself and swam lazily towards the floating garments.

Whilst he did that, Clark turned his attention to the wet pile beside him. Even though he wanted to wait a few more days before going to Cottonwood, he had a feeling that the sensation of salt infused fabric on his skin would make him mad before that, so it was with a sigh that he resigned himself to making an earlier trip.

He rummaged through the pile to find the thinnest, most breathable pieces he owned. Once he had both a shirt and a pair of pants, he went into his house and hung them up, hoping they'd dry and not be too stiff by the time he could go wash the rest.

As he walked back outside the mer was on land, and much to Clark's chagrin, holding his underwear in his mouth. Clark cleared his throat and approached him, holding out his hand. "Alright, hand em over."

The mer opened his mouth, and the underwear fell onto the ground with a wet slap. Clark knew from eyeing the few pairs there that this wasn't all of them, but he supposed he should be thankful the mer had gotten the few that he had and wasn't forcing Clark's hand in going commando for the foreseeable future.

He bent over to pick them up, and felt his ire rise as he noticed the small holes in them. “Really couldn’t have used your hands, huh?” Clark muttered as his finger pushed through one of the small indents in the fabric.

The mer only shrugged and leant back across the sand, his tail swishing once more. Clark took a deep breath. “So, are we even now?”

The mer pondered the question, but as Clark stared at him, his foot tapping as he waited for his response, he only crossed his arms and shrugged one more.

Clark huffed a sigh. “Look, you can be mad at me, but I mean it. No more of this--” he gestured to the wet clothes. “--From now on if you're pissed. You let me know.”

A glare was the only response he got and it was as Clark watched that face, that his shoulders slumped and he let out a sigh. Suddenly the mers earlier tangent made a little more sense. “Oh.” He looked away. “I get it.”

The mer tilted his head at that and sat up, eyeing Clark.

“You can't use words to let me know when you’re mad.” Clark said softly. “You were upset about the whale, and then the chicken, and you couldn’t express that anger with words, so you took it out on my clothes.”

The mer looked away. But Clark saw him nodding, and despite how he tried to hide it; the expression on his face seemed all the more bitter.

Clark crouched down and set the underwear back on the sand. “Look, I know we have our troubles communicating.” He reached out for the mers hand and surprisingly, he let him take it. “But if you take the time to try and talk to me, i’ll listen and do what I can to understand you. If you're mad, or annoyed, or upset ‘cause of something I did, you need to let me know. We’ll get there, I promise, even if it takes some time.”

The mer didn’t respond right away. But as the seconds ticked by, eventually, he turned to him and moved in closer, resting his head against Clark’s shoulder. He let out a quiet grumble, and Clark huffed. “And I promise i’ll never give you chicken ever again.”

That caused a smile, and the mer tucked in even closer against his neck, purring. Clark swallowed as he felt the heat pool in his face and gut, and he quickly stood up. He cleared his throat. “Alright, now that that's dealt with; I gotta go deal with all of this.” He looked over to the pile and didn’t even attempt to hide the frown on his face.

In the end the trip to Cottonwood to wash his clothes didn’t take up as much of the day as Clark had thought it would. He got there-- looking more disheveled and haggard than he has any recollection of ever looking-- and after washing and drying his clothes, he made his way to Lucy’s to pick up some supplies.

Ordinarily, he would use this opportunity to catch up with Lucy, but as he entered the store on this occasion he realised that wasn’t going to be an option. He noticed Colin walking through the aisles as he stepped inside, and after making eye contact with him, Clark began to throw things into his basket, hoping to check out and be on his way as fast as humanly possible.

Yet, despite his rushing, he was still stopped a few yards from the store by a voice calling his name and despite how much Clark wanted to ignore it, he slowly turned around.

Colin was still in the doorway, but he let the door close as he approached Clark. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Clark said, frowning. “What is it?”

Colin looked around, and Clark could have sworn he could see the sweat collecting across his forehead. His heart was hammering too, and despite how much he told himself he disliked the man before him, he could still feel his concern mount even though he wanted to ignore it.

After a few moments of silence, Clark debated just walking away, but as though Colin had heard that thought, he blurted out, “I'm sorry.”

“Uh.” Clark pursed his lips as he tried to parse what he was hearing. “It’s okay?” He ended up saying.

Clark didn't know what response Colin was looking for, but apparently that wasn’t it as he let his head fall forward. He let out a shaky breath as he stared at the floor, and all of a sudden he started moving, hurriedly walking away.

As he watched him go, Clark could feel his concern and confusion fighting for dominance in his mind, but in the end the confusion won and he ended up rooted to the spot for a while as he tried to understand what exactly had just happened.

Colin was sorry, but for what, Clark didn't know. He thought back to the last time he had even seen him; on the boat as Antonio stabbed the mer and he and Steve watched on. Was that it? Was Colin feeling remorse for his actions on that day? Was it for Elyss? Or for Tom? Or was there something else that Clark didn’t know about that was causing this need to repent?

In the end, despite how much Colin’s apology weighed on his mind, he ignored it for now and made his way home. After getting there, and putting his clothes back inside his dresser where they belong, he fell onto his bed and resumed his earlier contemplation.

The mer chose to join him as he thought, lounging beside him in the tub, dozing. It was as Clark watched him sleep, that he could almost feel something looming, something that he couldn’t even comprehend beyond how it seemed to make his spine tingle. As he watched the mer, he could feel his attention wane, and all of sudden it was Colin’s face there before him, and the more he focused on it, the more the subtleties of it became apparent. The drawn lips, the tired eyes, the reigned expression.

The whole day was spent dwelling on that face. As Clark went around the island, it was as though his body were running on autopilot. He had no recollection of doing anything, and yet, the sun was soon lower in the sky and the clouds were brewing above. He could feel a storm coming.

He tried to tell himself that was what he was anticipating. Something in the air had told him the wind and rain was coming, and yet, even as he told himself that, the unease didn’t leave and Colin’s face remained. As evening rolled in and the rain began to fall, Clark retired to his bed. The mer was still in the tub, and as Clark lay down beside him, he watched his sleeping face once more and found himself asleep soon after.

At least, he thought he was asleep. But the sound of wind rattling against his windows and the pitter patter of rain never left. If anything it grew louder and louder until it became a blanket of noise so thick it was as though there were suddenly no sound at all. Eventually this deafening silence had Clark opening his eyes and yet, when he expected to see his cabin he instead found a vast emptiness.

He saw it then. The lake he was coming to know intimately.

He drifted towards it, and when he reached the edge, he crouched down and sat, watching the rippling surface.

It was as he watched the surface that he saw movement along the edge. It was an eel and as it swam, a thought struck him;

A lone eel in the water. Black eyes in the darkness. Sharp teeth snapping shut.

He jolted awake and all at one the silence left and the sound of the storm resumed. He looked to the mer to see if he had awoken him, but when he saw those eyes remain shut. Clark took stock of himself, and let out a slow breath.

He had seen it. He had finally seen it, and now. It was all coming back to him. He stood up on shaky legs and made his way to his desk. He fell onto the seat and opened his journal, he started to write and didn't stop until he had gotten every word out.

July 27th 2016

Cont'd

I think I know why I keep having that dream.

When I was a kid, I used to go swimming. Ma and Pa never knew of course. If they did, I know I'd have never heard the end of it. They told me all about the mers, to keep away from them, and I did what I was told. I kept away from those things.

But the water? I couldn't do it. On a hot summer's day I would look across those waves, and want nothing more than to plunge myself into them, to go as deep as I could and stay there. Surrounded by blue.

So that's what I did. I'd wait till the dead of night and then go swimming. I did it for months and months, swimming across the ocean floor where I could see it all of it spread out before me. An abyss of nothingness, that no human had ever had the privilege of seeing the way I had.

Then one night whilst I swam, I came across it. Where I've been dreaming of.

I saw the lake.

Well, it wasn't really a lake. They're called brine pools; places in the ocean where the water is denser because of the higher salinity. But to twelve year old me, it looked like a lake.

The water was murky, like liquid smoke, and it was surrounded by rocks and molluscs. Once I found that lake, I'd go there every evening and sit there looking at the rippling surface for what felt like hours, and eventually, I'd even forget where I was.

I've never felt peace like it.

That deep down, you can only hear the water, the distant hums of whales and the quiet batting of fish fins as they found traction in the water. All else is gone. No voices, no people. Just yourself and the water.

I think I managed to block out what I saw down there because it didn't even feel like I was awake anymore. I was asleep, dreaming even, and the water was singing me a lullaby.

But I know I was awake.

One night as I was looking out across the pool, I saw movement. It was so slow I took me a minute to realise what I was seeing.

It was an eel. A meek looking thing, batting itself along the lake's surface, but then all of a sudden, it dove into the lake but when it came out, it was not the same. It contorted, writhed, as though drowning in the water. Before long it died. The salt in the pool was too much for it.

It floated there, along the surface of smoke, and that's when I saw what had been sitting along the edge the entire time.

It had been so still I didn't even see it laying there.

At first I thought it was a fish. Some ugly, prehistoric thing that the ocean was known for harboring in its depths. But it was more than that. It was one of those things, but it was a kind I had never seen before or since.

It looked like a nightmare; so far removed from its human looking counterparts that I wouldn't have even thought them the same genus. Yet it was. It had hands. It had a face. It had a torso. A tail. It was one of them.

Its hand came forward, spindly and black, and reached out across the water, grabbing the limp eel and bringing it to its deformed mouth where it bit its head clean off.

I don't remember what happened after that. I don't even know how I got home, but I must have gotten there somehow because the next thing I know, I'm in bed and Ma is waking me up for breakfast.

That thing haunted me. For years, when I looked at those waves all I saw were black eyes and jagged teeth, and I never went into the water again.

As the years passed, more and more of that thing and that night faded from my memory. It stopped feeling real, it was just a horrible dream that my conscious conjured up, no more real than the dreams that preceded or followed it. Before long, it left my memory all together. A blank space where my mind dared not to go, and I never wanted to venture into.

Until I learnt its name.

When I heard those words, I knew that's what I had seen down there. An abyssal fin. A mer so warped by the pressure of the ocean that it no longer even looks like a mer. Yet, if I am to believe Dr. Hadal, is.

As I sit here and think of that night, I can still feel a fog over the memory. It's sparse, with the whole image of the mer now lost to time, and only fragments of its appearance coming back to me now. But I know there is more to it than I remember. More that I am choosing to not think about, and for the life of me, I don't know why. I thought it was just the mer itself plaguing me, that awful face, those blank eyes, but now I keep asking myself; what happened after? Why don't I remember getting home? ~~Why do I feel like it's calling me?~~

As Clark finished writing, his eyes lingered on the last sentence and carefully, he drew a line through it. Despite still seeing the words clearly, he had hoped the line would somehow keep those words at bay and he could push that idea from his mind altogether. That thing was not calling to him, there was nothing more to that night.

And yet, that didn't happen. As Clark sat at his desk, head in hands, he tried to push thoughts of that thing from his mind once more, and yet they stayed. He supposed the one up side he could see was that age had recoloured the memories. Thoughts of the thing no longer filled him with dread, or caused his mind to shut down before he could remember what he had seen. Only now that he was grown, was he able to look at that moment of his life and not look away in fear.

Despite that, he didn't know what exactly the dream was trying to tell him. Perhaps it was that the mer he had seen had indeed been real and not just a dream, and that, according to Elijah, it was a mer that was thought to be extinct. He didn't know what to do with the information, and his earlier tiredness was coming back to him; the adrenaline forced upon him by the dream now gone.

He went back to bed, and fell into the sheets. The wind was still howling still, so Clark pulled the pillow over his ear, and tried to relax his mind until sleep took hold once more.

Then he fell asleep; oblivious to the boat approaching his island.

Chapter End Notes

Hullo all!

Sorry for the delay with this update. My motivation took a hit this past week with having headaches pretty much every day (which was sooo much fun), but also, my general procrastination is coming back slowly but surely, so chances are, it is going to be every two

weeks for updates going forward, but I like to keep things spontaneous as you know, so it could be less! (also could be more, but it won't be longer than 9 months between updates, promise XD)

Also hearing from you guys how much you are enjoying this fic is really what keeps me going. I love reading all your lovely comments <3 <3 <3

Anyway, enough of the boring stuff. Let's talk this chapter! We had a title name drop, Blue being a little shit, Colin being vry suss, and Clark remembering what he saw on that fateful day, and of course, that boat.... What it all means, who knows... ;)

Alrighty, with that said, as always, comment and kudos if you're liking the story so far! And I will catch you all next time! Take care! :D

Chapter 17

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The storm's getting bad.

Is that the door?

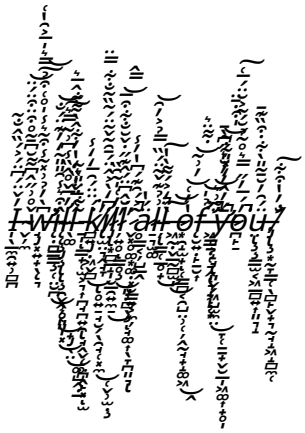
Must be the mer.

But are those… Footsteps?

No, can't be. Must be the rain.

Something fell. I think it broke.

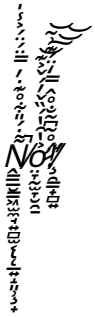
Wait, screaming? Why is he--



Fuck. My head, what the Hell is going on?

Wait.

What was that bang?



Augh. Now there's ringing… In my ears...

It's so loud.

Why?

What is happening?

When Clark opened his eyes, he was confronted with darkness. He could feel the soft pillow still pressed over his face, and for a moment, he thought the strange sounds he had heard must have been from a mix of delirium and the storm. A scream of wind. A loud bang of thunder. A piercing voice.

What that didn't explain was just why his ears were still ringing, or why wind and rain now swirled around his cabin. No, the bang hadn't been from high up above the swirling clouds, the sharp scream hadn't been a misheard howl of wind. It had all come from this room.

Then he heard voices.

Why are there voices? Who is here?

"Jesus christ, Toni."

“What? The screaming was gonna wake him up. Now come on and help me restrain it.”

“Oh my God, we fucking--”

“Colin, I swear to God if you start freaking out again, I'm throwing you in the water.”

“We could have talked with him, maybe he would have--”

“We have been over this, he wasn’t going to give up his mer, so just forget about it. What’s done is done.”

“Speaking of, what are we meant to do with it?”

“The tranquilizers are working. Looks like it’s calming down. Once it’s out, we’ll put the muzzle and blindfold on and we can move it to my boat.”

“What about--”

“Colin. He is *gone* . I shot him in the *head* , now will you just grab the things tail so we can fucking leave already?”

Clark frowned. Restraints? Tranquilizers? *What? What is going on?*

The sound of sloshing water came next. Then the sound of something else falling and breaking.

“ *Jesus*, I thought you said the tranqs had kicked in!”

“They should have! I gave him enough to put down a cow, how the *fuck* is he still awake?”

“Give him more, come on Toni… I can’t keep a hold of him.”

More things hit the floor, quickly followed by muffled screams, but slowly, those sounds stopped altogether, until only haggard breathing filled the room.

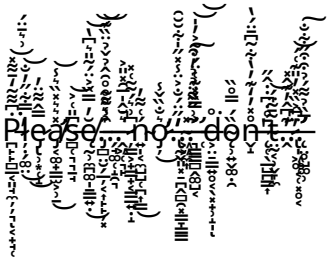
“Fuck me. Alright. *Now* we can move him to the boat.”

He heard the creak of the door as it was once again opened, and soon the sound of rain engulfed the room once more. The wind was still howling, and with each violet burst of it Clark's sheets grew wetter until he was almost slick with water.

What a strange dream. Clark thought to himself as he lay there.

Perhaps he was lucid. It would help explain what he was feeling. He’d heard of similar things happening to some people as they slept, but even that couldn’t explain how real everything felt. Even now as he slowly moved his hand, he could feel the damp sheets under his fingers, the wind whipping against him. Despite this, he didn’t rise. He was so tired, and for a time, he simply listened to the rain, his body almost relinquishing to sleep once more.

Almost.



A swirl of panic rushed through him, and he jolted up. As he turned to the tub, he let out a choked breath when he found it empty. It hadn’t been a dream. Whatever happened here was very much real, and as Clark replayed the words he’d heard he felt his stomach churn. He jumped up and looked around the room. The floor was wet and clumps of sand; his desk was toppled over with its contents strewn across the ground. The ringing was still there in his ears, and when he reached for his pillow,

he found a single hole running all the way through it. He soon spotted the bullet embedded in the wooden floorboard.

He swallowed down the bile threatening to spill out. That could wait for now, he thought, he had other, more pressing issues to attend to. He stumbled out of his home through the still open door. The rain was making it hard to see, but that didn't matter to Clark who spotted a group of men slowly making their way to the jetty with something heavy being carried between them.

He ran towards them. "Hey!" He screamed through the rain, and despite the cacophony noise, he was heard.

The men whirled on him, the load in their arms dropping to the floor with single thud. He took in all their faces, and the moment recognition struck, Clark felt whatever shock he had evaporate into thin air. Had he been expecting this? No. And yet, as he stared at Antonio's face, Clark could name every emotion he was experiencing and surprise was not one of them.

Antonio's eyes blew wide. "What the fuck?" He muttered.

"You said you shot him!" Colin shouted, stepping back, his hands going to his hair. "Oh my God. We're dead, we are so dead!"

"Colin, calm down!" Antonio yelled, his hand reaching for his gun. The moment it was out of its holster it was on Clark. "Sorry about this, Kent." He said. "Nothing personal."

Clark ignored him for the moment, his eyes going to the mer instead. He wasn't moving, but he was definitely still alive if the heartbeat Clark was hearing was anything to go by. The only issue was that it had slowed to a crawl. One that had Clark's own hammering at the idea at any moment it might just stop all together. He couldn't think about that now, he told himself. He took a deep breath and raised a brow to Antonio. "That's a lie." He said blankly. "This is a little personal."

Antonio smiled at that, before quickly shrugged. "Alright, so it is. But I can't help the fact that you are the one who has a literally gold mine sleeping in their house."

Clark looked to his 'gold mine' once more, before forcing his stare away. "So that's why you're doing this?" Clark asked. "Money?"

“Do you know how much someone would pay for a mer like this?” Antonio said, using his foot to prod at the mers limp body. “A million. One *million* dollars for a single mer.”

Someone. Clark pressed his lips together. There was only one person he could think of that fit the bill and it just so happens that he knew for a fact Antonio knew him as well. Clark shook his head. “So Elijah put you up to this?” He rolled his eyes. “Go figure.”

“He doesn’t know we’re here.” Colin said, grimacing. “No one does. Well, aside from--”

“Colin. *Shut up* .”

“Why, though?” Clark asked, crossing his arms. “I mean, you plan on killing me, right? What’s that saying, ‘dead men tell no tales’? Or are you planning on missing my head again?”

“God, how can you be looking into the barrel of a gun, and still be a cocky shit?” Antonio huffed. “I have to say, i'm a little impressed, Kent. Most people would be pissing themselves if they were in your shoes.”

“I'm not most people.” Clark muttered. “And given I’m as good as dead, I figured I should at least be allowed to know how you found out where I lived.”

The men all looked to one another, and slowly, Steve reached into his pocket. He pulled out something small, and with a flick of the wrist a blade emerged from it. A pocket knife. “Marcos." Clark said, and despite it all, he didn't even sound surprised.

“Don't blame the kid.” Antonio said, with a sigh. “We know about him coming to visit you, know about him helping you in getting rid of the mer thanks to that knife we found, and you can imagine with Salvator sick right now, Marcos didn’t want us to tell him what he did. If it makes you feel better, he really didn’t want to, but...”

“Wait, Salvator’s sick?” Clark asked, frowning. “How sick?”

“Cancer.” Steve said, pressing his lips together. “It’s early stages, but…”

“Considering his age you can imagine Marcos doesn’t want to upset him right now.” Antonio finished for him.

Clark’s mouth fell open, and for a moment he was lost for words. He thought of Marcos' visit, to the reason he was even able to visit his island in the first place. The hospital. X-rays. “Fuck.” He muttered to himself as he brought his hands to his face. “So that’s it, you threatened a *kid* to tell you where I lived so you could make some money?” Clark grimaced before lowering his hands. “God, I knew you were trash but this really is something else.”

“We didn’t have a choice!” Colin blurted. He was shaking now, whether it be from the cold of the rain or from something else, Clark didn’t know. “Just like we didn’t want to hurt Tom, but--”

Steve reached for his arm. “Colin, you need to calm down--”

“No!” He said, pulling away. “God, this is all my fault. If I didn’t mention the fucking land, you wouldn’t have tried to threaten Tom! And none of this would be happening right now!”

“Colin. Calm. Down.” Antonio said, his voice treading the fine line between cold and thunderous. “Just go to the boat. We’ll handle this.”

“No.” He said, shaking his head. He turned those watering eyes to Clark. “We did it. We killed Tom. I asked if I could buy some land from him, to maybe try my hand at farming instead of shipping, but he said no, and when I told Toni about it all he said we could ‘persuade’ him by threatening his mer.” Colin laughed. It was a sharp and bitter sound filled with all too much panic. “And how did that go Toni? Huh? How did it go when you shot the mer? How did it go when Tom pulled out a shotgun and you fucking killed him?!”

“Colin!” Antonio snapped. “For the love of God, calm down!”

“It’s easy for you to say, you have Carla wrapped around your fucking finger. You could throw me and Steve under the bus and you’d be able to walk away scot free!”

“Well, I wouldn't do that.” He said, looking away. “We’re a team, remember?”

Colin didn’t respond, opting instead to huff and walk away down the beach. He didn’t stray far though and as Clark watched him pace, he thought for a moment. “So that's what you did.” He said, looking between them all. “Porter. Tom. You threatened their mers to get what you wanted out of them. The shipment and the land. Porter complied, but when Tom didn’t, you killed him.”

Antonio’s eyes narrowed. “How do you know about Porter?”

“How do you think I know?” Clark asked, unable to prevent himself from rolling his eyes. “When I went to Redding, I found out from them that the shipment never went missing. When I confronted Porter about it, he told me everything.”

“Well then..." Antonio muttered as he pressed his lips together. “Guess i'll be paying him a visit when we get back.”

“Why? I’m the only other person who knows and I’m as good as dead, aren't I? What would threatening him some more do exactly?” Clark asked, tilting his head. “Unless you were planning to try and use this to get another shipment out of him and fuck Cottonwood again.”

“Hey.” Steve ground out. “We bust our asses getting the traders their goods every week, risking our lives, Hell, Colin nearly *died* when his boat capsized. No one appreciates what we do, so yeah, we took the Sacramento shipment so we’d be okay for a little while whilst we recouped, but nobody got hurt.”

“Right. Nobody got hurt.” Clark nodded. “I can imagine it's easier to justify your actions when you think you have the moral high ground.”

Steve shook his head. “Fuck me, this is a shit show…” He brought his hand to his face. “Toni, this needs to end. Now.”

“You have a gun, too.” Antonio said, though he didn’t lower his.

“That’s not what I meant.” Steve said softly.

“Really? You’re getting cold feet? *Now?* ” He ground out. “When I told you about the money, both of you were all for it, but now that we have the mer literally in our hands, you wanna walk away?”

“I thought we’d just take it. When you shot your gun, maybe there was a reason the bullet missed. We’re being given a second chance here. Tom we can maybe argue was self defense, but this would be murder.” Steve edged a few steps closer to Antonio, gingerly offering his hand. “You don't want to be a murderer, do you Toni?”

Antonio groaned. “You really think we can just *leave* ? After what we’ve done, after what he knows?” He asked incredulously. “We *can’t* let him live.”

He could hear Colin sobbing off to his side, could see the way Steve’s shoulders slumped in submission as his hand lowered. Antonio eyed him, and Clark knew what was coming next. “Sorry, Kent.”

“Wait.” Clark said, holding up his hand, and surprisingly, Antonio obliged. “I want to give you the best odds possible.” He said, walking up to him, Antonio flinched, but didn't shoot. “Put the barrel in here,” Clark said as he pointed to his mouth. “That way you can't miss.”

“What?”

Clark tilted his head. “What? Getting cold feet?” He smiled, opening his mouth. “Come on, do it.”

Antonio’s heart was hammering, and the rain was coming down so thick he could hardly see the world around him anymore. Yet, through the sound of rumbling thunder high above, he still made out the shaky breath Antonio let out. “You're a sick man, Kent.” He muttered.

Clark felt the bullet not a moment later.

He had hoped to catch it in his teeth, but it ended up hitting the back of his throat. He gave a choked gasp as he fell back into the sand. The ringing was back in full force, and yet through it he still made out Colin sobbing, as well as Steve letting out a single sigh. “Fuck me, Toni...”

“It's done.” He said, putting his gun away. “Now come on, let’s move the mer.”

Clark lay there a moment longer before sitting up. He rubbed his throat as he tried to work the bullet up back into his mouth. Steve and Antonio were so focused on the mer, that it was only as Colin screamed that they took notice of Clark very much still alive on the floor. He waved at them before reaching into his mouth and pulling out the bullet.

“What the fuck. What the fuck!” Steve yelled, stumbling away. “What are you-- what is happening?” He whirled on Antonio. “Shoot him again!”

Antonio pulled his gun out, and pointed it at Clark. His hands shook so badly that the first bullet ended up in the sand, and only the second caught Clark in the chest. It bounced off and landed not too far from his feet. What followed was a moment of silence so profound that it felt as though even the rain and wind stopped to allow it to permeate.

The men all stared at where the bullet landed. “Oh, good God.” Antonio muttered.

“Did I not mention I could do that?” Clark asked, as he stood up and looked down at his shirt. He ran his finger along the hole now there. “I’m bulletproof.” He said, with the same ease one might confirm their name. “Back in Metropolis they used to call me the Man of Steel for that very reason.”

“The man of--” Antonio sputtered as he dropped the gun. “You’re, you’re--”

“Superman?” Clark finished for him. “Yeah… yeah, I am.” As he took in the sight of the men before him, Clark let out a sigh. “Now, with that out of the way, lets talk.” He held his hand out towards their boat, and without any other prompting the men walked towards it.

Clark followed them, casting his eyes down to the mer still on the floor. He wanted to release him but given who was still on the island, Clark reluctantly left him for now and climbed on board the boat. He recognized it. He had been on it before, back when he rescued the mer, and he followed the men below deck.

It was quieter down here, with the hull doing a good job of muffling the wind and rain. It was also a nice space, fitted with a bar and some plush seating. Clark took the liberty of sitting on the large couch in the middle of the room, leaning into the soft cushions. “Now then. You have one minute to tell me why I shouldn’t throw you into the water.”

“Please, we’re sorry." Colin let out, falling to the floor by Clark’s feet. “We shouldn't have done it, but we were desperate, please--”

“Not you.” Clark said, shaking his head. He brought his hand up and pointed a single finger at Antonio. “I'm much more curious about what you’ll say.”

In the time walking from the beach, Antonio seemed to get a better hold of himself, and only jerked his head up in defiance at Clark’s request. He sat down on one of the arm chairs and leant back. “Why should I bother?”

Clark tilted his head. “I dunno, is your life enough of an incentive?”

“You won’t kill me.” Antonio said firmly. “Superman doesn’t kill.”

“Yeah, you are right about that…” Clark said, tenting his hands. “But I'm not Superman anymore, and I haven't been for a while.”

“Still.” Antonio said, though this time Clark could hear the quiver returning to his voice. “You have morals.”

“Do I though?” Clark said, frowning. “You know what I did the day Metropolis fell?” He eyed the men around him, and smiled mirthlessly. “I let a whole city drown. I flew away whilst thousands called out to me to save them and I ignored them all.” Clark felt his eyes burn with tears and he looked away. He took a breath and after composing himself, he went on. “You think I'd have any issue doing that again with you three?”

“Please." Steve said, remaining in the middle of the room, his hands held out as though to placate them both. “We can solve this without any bloodshed.”

“There wouldn’t be blood.” Clark said listlessly. “Well, not unless the mers showed up…”

“Oh God…” Colin let out, curling his hands into his eyes. “Please, no, this is not happening… this is not happening…”

“Okay, well, you haven't dumped us in the water yet, so,” Antonio said, crossing his arms. “Clearly, you don’t want us dead. So why not? What do you want from us?”

“What do I want?” Clark asked, raising a brow. “Well, that's easy. I want you to never come to my island again, and if you even think about touching my mer again, I will throw you into the middle of the ocean and watch you drown.”

Antonio nodded slowly at that, whilst Steve and Colin’s were far more frantic. “And?” Antonio asked coolly.

“Marcos. You give him back his knife and if you *ever* tell Salvator what happened, I will find your homes and crush them into rubble.” Clark said, looking back down at his hands. “And if you threaten Porter or his mer to try and get another shipment out of him, or because of what he told me, I will throw your boats into the sun.”

There was silence for a good while, only punctuated by the occasional sob or burst of rain against the hull. When Clark eyed the men before him, only Antonio returned it. “Anything else?”

He thought of Tom, of Elyss hanging up in that archway and pressed his lips together. He could try and get them their justice, as simply looking at Colin told him that he’d need only say the word for him to repeat everything he had been told on the beach, but given that the evidence was all but destroyed and that, as Colin had already stated, Antonio could shift the blame easily thanks to Carla, he simple shrugged. “If I think of anything, i'll let you know.”

“Well, then.” Antonio got up. “I think we’re done here.”

Clark got up too, but as he was about to leave, another thought came to him and he eyed Antonio. “So

Elijah really didn’t send you?” When he looked away from Clark’s inquisitive gaze, Clark’s eyes narrowed. “And don't think of lying.”

“He really didn’t." Steve said for him, rubbing the back of his neck as he let out a sign. “We sort of have a ‘don't ask don't tell’ policy with him. We get him mers, and don't tell him how we got them, and he doesn't ask.”

“He did want your mer.” Antonio said slowly. “But, he didn’t know we were doing this, no.”

Clark looked around at them, and when he felt he could verify what he heard from their heartbeats, he shrugged his shoulders. “Good enough for me.” He said. “If I wasn’t clear with my earlier request, no more dealing with him either. I don't care if you find five hundred black fins, you trade him mers; i'll come for you.”

“Understood.” Steve said, sending a nod his way. He approached Antonio and rested his hand on his elbow. “Now.” He said softly. “Let's get going.”

As Clark stepped off the boat, he stayed standing in the rain and watched them sail away. Even as their boat became a dot along the horizon, he could still feel their presence like it was a weight across his shoulders. He closed his eyes and let the rain wash over him, hoping it would take with it every scrap of dirt he felt like was now festering on his skin.

Maybe this *was* all a dream. Maybe in the morning everything will have been washed away by the rain and wind and he could go on pretending everything was okay.

He knew that wouldn’t happen, but it was nice to imagine that it would, if only for a moment.

He then turned to the only other person here with him. Clark grimaced as he took in the sight. The mer was still unconscious on the ground, so Clark scooped him up gently before bringing him back to the cabin, only to be reminded of the state the place was in.

As there wasn’t exactly an extensive list of alternate places Clark could go, he turned around and went towards his boat. It was cramped, but at least it was dry.

In the small bedroom, he set the mer down on the cot and began the process of freeing him. He started with the muzzle, and then eased off the blindfold. As he did, he saw the mers eyes flutter open and Clark let out a choked gasp.

The mer gave the faintest of whines, and Clark didn't even think as he ripped the rest of the restraints off of him. "Jesus, you're--" he blurted, his eyes burning with the threat of tears. "You're *awake* ?"

The mer gave another faint whine, and Clark listened to that heart beat once more. It was so slow he could have been forgiven for thinking it had stopped all together, but that didn't matter to the mer who apparently through all the sedatives, was still conscious. He'd been awake the whole time and Clark let out a shaky breath at the thought. He reached for the mers face, gently smoothing away the hair swept across it. "Shh, it's okay, I'm okay, you're okay…"

Tears sprung from the mers eyes as he gave a few more faint whines, and Clark leant in close, pressing his forehead against his. "Shh…" he murmured. "I got you, no ones gonna hurt you… I'm sorry."

The mer tried to move, but the tranquilizer was doing at least part of its job and his movements were slurred and stilted. Still, he managed to get a hand around Clark's neck, holding him there pressed up against him. He tried to speak, but all that came out was a series of broken chirps that ended with a reedy breath.

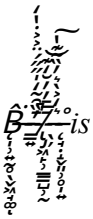
"You're okay… I'm okay…" Clark repeated over and over until they no longer felt like words. As he said it, he wondered if he were doing it for his own benefit, as the longer he thought about what had happened the more the idea of what *could* have happened dawned on him. He'd have been killed. The mer would have been dragged away to who knows what fate and Clark would have been left to rot on his island. Would anyone have found him? Or would he have remained there until he was nothing more than dust and bone?

There was a time in Clark's life where he cursed his immortality, but right in this moment, he thanked every God he knew that he was able to survive this night.

As he repeated his mantra, the mers eyes slowly drifted closed. Clark waited to see if that heartbeat would continue on, and when it did, only then did Clark pull back and take a deep breath.

The storm was still pounding against the boat and land, but Clark didn't care if his cabin was ruined. Didn't even care if it was pulled up out of the dirt and destroyed. All he cared about was that the mer was safe.

He's safe, B[illegible]is safe.



He paused.

B?

The thought took him aback, as as he focused on it he could feel that there was more hiding there, but for some reason the only thing that he could hear was that letter. But why? He watched the mer closely, looking at his gentle features and slowly, the letter became louder and louder, as though a force of nature in and of itself, one that took a hold of Clark's mind and refused to relinquish its hold.

He didn't want to admit it, but the more he thought about that thought, the more he felt as if he knew the answer to his own question.

I could… I could name him…

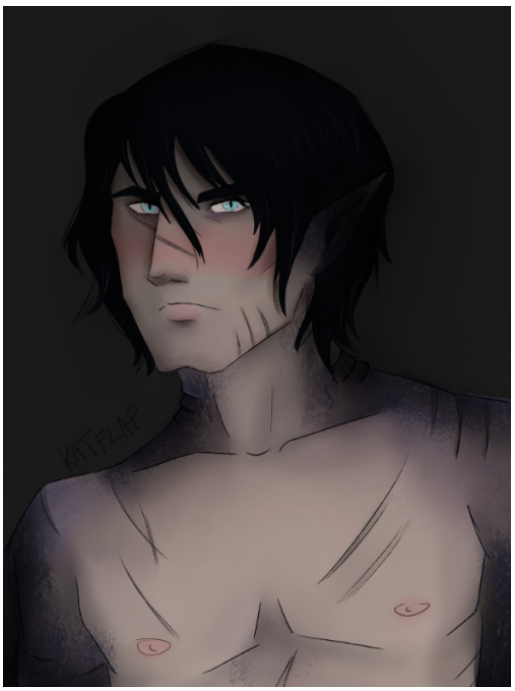
~~*A name?*~~

Clark jolted at the thought. *No. A name would be too much.* His mind asserted.

But... Would it be? The fragile minority implored.

It was as he sat and watched the mers sleeping face that he realised what he had been doing was fruitless, that no amount of distancing or self control would prevent what he was now feeling. It was a certainty, and no amount of denial would change that.

He took a deep breath and lay down next to the mer. He closed his eyes and tried to let sleep take him, but he was no longer tired, his mind was alive with thought and in the end, he simply lay there next to the mer, and watched over him until the first streaks of sunlight touched the sky.



Chapter End Notes

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. WE'RE GETTING INTO IT NOW, BUDDY.

But srsly, fuck Antonio.

There is so much to get into about this chapter, but I will just summarize by saying. My poor baby Blue T^T

Also I hope y'all enjoy the art work I did! If you would like to see more of it or maybe just want to come say hi, the link to my tumblr is: Batman-Katflap I'm trying to use it more as I sort of left it alone for a very long time, but I'm hoping now to get back into it. If you would like to see another piece I did for the fic, head on over to chapter 12. I just embedded it today, so if it worked you should see some Blue/Clark cuteness :D

Anyway, that is all for this update! I hope you all enjoyed and as always lemme know what you thought! Until next time! :3 x

Chapter 18

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 28th 2016

Somewhere between the dawn and morning, Clark must have drifted off. He knew this as he had no recollection of the time passing, but also knew it must have occurred if the sun now filtering in through the small window above was anything to go by.

He stared at the light for a while longer, watching as particles of dust danced in it until he became lost in their movement. Eventually however, he turned to the mer to see if he too were awake, and sure enough, he was.

Those bright eyes were trained on him, watching him fervently. Clark felt a faint smile pull on his lips the longer he looked back. “Mornin’.”

And that was all it took.

The mer lunged at him, pushing Clark down into the bed as he practically assaulted his face by rubbing his checks across it. Clark was frozen as the mer nuzzled him, and whilst under normal circumstances he might have been confused, this morning he couldn’t help but share the sentiments.

“Hey, hey.” He muttered as the mer kept nuzzling, his chirps and whines spilling from his mouth like an endless drip of water. Clark reached for his shoulders, pushing him back to stare into those eyes again. “I’m okay, how are you?”

The mer made a face of incredulity, and swiped at Clark’s hands until he let go. Clark obliged with an eye roll, and the mer resumed his nuzzling. Clark wondered how long it would go on for, but eventually the mer slowed his movements, until he simply lay on top of Clark, his hands curling around his head, entangled in his hair.

Clark knew he couldn’t move without having to also move the mer shaped mollusc now attached to him, but he tried. He sat up and even though the mer grumbled, Clark simply brought his hands around his torso, pulling him in close. “Come on, now. We need to go inside.” Though Clark couldn't help but grimace as he said the words. His cabin must be in a dreadful state, but there was no use in delaying the inevitable. He had to deal with it sooner or later.

The mer however, was still adamant in not moving and when he pulled back to look up at Clark, he chirped and whined some more. Clark couldn’t gather the meaning of these sounds, and sure enough, his confusion must have been obvious as the mer pulled one of his hands free from Clark’s hair, and ran it across his temple, trialing that area of skin over and over again. Clark swallowed thickly.

“I told you.” He said softly, taking that hand and squeezing it gently. “I’m okay. I didn’t get hurt.”

Despite the clear trepidation on his expression, the mer chose not to argue through the medium of chirps and instead chose to resume his earlier clinging. Clark tried to prevent the smile from coming onto his face, and he only managed it when he remembered what he had told himself.

Thoughts are okay, so long as you never let it get beyond that.

Right. Thoughts are fine… Just don’t.

Don’t what? What exactly was he doing right now? Holding the mer, and stroking his hair as the mer refused to let go of him. Were these still thoughts?

Could it ever go back to just being thought?

No, they couldn’t and Clark felt the last of his resolve crumble at that realisation.

It was liberating in a way, to simply accept what was about to happen. There was nothing he could have done about it. Not really.

He lifted the mer with ease, readjusting in him in his arms once stood, and despite the protests, carried him back to the cabin, taking care to set him on the bed as gently as he could once there.

He was right. The place was a disaster zone. Despite the sun now shining, it hadn't been out for long and as such the room was still musty with damp. Sand almost covered the wooden floors, and all of his furniture was somewhere between 'bad' and 'completely ruined'. He didn't care though, in this moment, he had more pressing things on his mind.

As Clark sat alongside the mer, he realised he didn't know what he was doing. He thought he had known, but the longer he looked at the mer, the more Clark could feel his mind breaking at the seams, his thoughts going off in every direction, leaving him lost in the middle, unsure which one to follow.

There was one telling him to walk away. ~~*You still have that option.*~~

There was one telling him to put him back in the water. ~~*You don't have to do this.*~~

There was one telling him to just kiss him. ~~*Don't do it.*~~ *Do it.*

Clark felt his breath coming out shallow and fast. He didn't know why, but as he sat there, that final trail of thought seemed to lodge itself in his mind, making it feel as though what he was about to do was inevitable, as though every second since he saw him on the beach was leading him to this moment. Each step leading him here. To him.

~~*Don't do it.*~~

He leant forward, his mouth parting slightly. For a moment, the mer didn't respond, though he did let out a breath as Clark's lips pressed gently against his own.

The mers eyes flickered shut, his hands reached for Clark. He set them on his shoulders so gently Clark could barely feel them through his shirt.

His lips were so soft, like plush silk and as Clark felt himself wanting to press onward, the rational part of his brain wrangled back control for a brief moment. He jolted back, before sitting there in stunned silence, unable to comprehend what he had just done. He felt his eyes water. “God fucking damn it.” He said, before burying his face in his hands.

Why? Why was this happening to him? He thought he was a good person, but apparently not if this was how God treated him.

~~*Not God. You did this.*~~

It was then that he felt it. That gentle touch again, so soft, on the small of his back. He looked up from his hands, his stare going to the only other person in the room with him.

The mer looked from Clark’s face to his own hand, to his own body. Was that sadness on his face? Did he understand what this meant for them? Or was he just as lost as Clark felt.

“You’re a mer. We-- *I* shouldn’t be doing this.” Clark said, his voice sounding so loud in the silence around him. “And yet…” he clasped his hands together with finality. “Here I am.”

There was no response. Clark knew there wasn't going to be one. Would never be one. No matter how long he waited.

That thought alone made the first tear fall.

"I have no idea why you're here. Why you keep coming back to me. Maybe it's 'cause you're like me. Alone." He wiped his face. "That makes me feel a little better. The idea that you're here because you want to be, and not because this is all some sort of game to you and I am the long awaited prize for your patience." He huffed a breath, chancing a look at the other. "But I can't prove that, I can't prove that without risking everything."

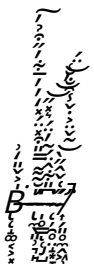
He took a deep breath. "If I get in that water, and you pull me down." Clark looked at the wall, unable to look the mer in the eye. "This ends."

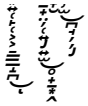
Clark brought his head into his hands, covering his eyes. He shook his head from side to side as he muttered under his breath. "But even if you don't try to pull me down, what does that prove? That you feel the same? Or just that you don't want me dead?" He couldn't help it, he sobbed. "No, it proves nothing. I don't know what is going on in that mind of yours. Why do you stay with me? *Why?* " Though the question was for the mer, he only asked it to himself.

The mer didn't speak, didn't make a single noise as his hand continued to run across Clark's back before finding its way to his head, running its way through his hair. Clark hated it. Hated how nice it felt. He couldn't help but lean into the touch.

He sat upright, and turned to the mer. He was still watching him with that same sombre expression and Clark realised how much he hated seeing it. Just as much as seeing those tear filled eyes from the night before. He never wanted to see the mer look like that ever again, he realised.

He took a breath, and pressed his forehead against the mers. He stared into those eyes; so bright, so clear.





That same thought from yesterday, that same letter. The longer he looked, the louder it became.

~~*A name?*~~

That was it; a way to make this feel okay with all of this.

If the mer was just using him; he could use him right back.

So what if he didn't care about him? So what if he was doing all this just to kill him? What guilt should he feel about taking advantage of that? None, Clark realised. None at all.

He pulled away, his eyes boring into the mers.

As he stared at the mer a single word left his mouth. "Blue." He muttered. "I'm gonna call you Blue." Blue like his eyes. His skin. "Blue." He repeated.

It felt right to call him something other than mer, and though the name didn't quite fit for whatever reason, it suited him well enough.

Blue didn't respond with words to Clark, though he did chirp softly as he pressed forward, his lips going for Clark's once more, resting them against his, just as Clark had done.

Yes. Clark felt his mind grow calm. *Somehow this feels better* .

~~*You named him.*~~

I did.

~~*You're going to regret this.*~~

No. He thought as he pushed Blue down onto the bed, his lips making their way across his check, peppering the skin with kisses. *I won't. This is how it will be, how it has to be.*

~~*I truly wonder what did it. Insanity or loneliness. Perhaps the former. After all, you had me, Clark. You always had me.*~~

Lois, please…

Clark jerked away, a cold sweat coming over him. His stomach convulsed and though it was empty, bile dribbled from his mouth out onto the floor beside where they laid. He gasped for air and in trying to find it, caught a glimpse of the mer's panic stricken face.

He reached for him, his hand gingerly trailing down Clark's check, before resting along his jaw.

His earlier suspicion quietened down as he watched Blue touch him with such gentleness.

Why…?

Why is he doing this?

But the voice didn't respond.

Clark didn't know what to think. His mind was on fire and the longer he looked at Blue the stronger those flames grew.

"I can't…" Clark stood up, and despite there not being any room in his cabin, he tried to walk away,

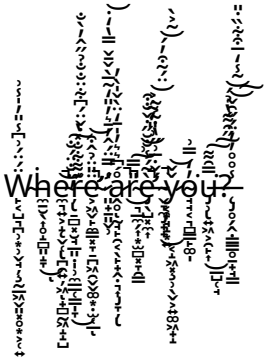
only to be stopped by the turned over desk and toppled chair. “I just… I can’t do this right now.” He said, turning to the mer. “This is a lot to take in. I’m sorry...”

Clark didn’t hang around. He knew it was a bad idea to walk away, and yet he seemed to only be capable of bad ideas today, so it did little to stop him. He walked back outside, and immediately turned and headed off towards the trees. He didn’t have an idea of where he was going at first, and yet his feet must have made the choice for him as he eventually made his way to the meadow.

Why was he here? To twist the knife further? He should go back, he could hear the mer calling for him, but even if he were to yell, Blue wouldn't be able to hear Clark from here.

No, here he was alone; alone with the only person he had ever loved.

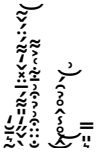
He approached the graves, and lowered himself down, staring at the plaques on the floor. His vision grew blurred and he knew the moment he blinked, the tears would fall. So he didn’t, he simply kept his eyes trained on the words written on the wood, and even as the tears slid down his cheeks, he didn’t blink.

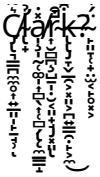


His head throbbed, and he took a sharp breath. Why was he doing this to himself? Why couldn’t he just move on?

~~Clark?~~

He eventually closed his eyes, and despite waking up only minutes ago, felt a haze of sleep wash over him.





~~Where are you?~~

~~Clark?~~

~~Are you in here?~~

“Clark?”

There was a knock at the bathroom door, and Clark pulled his toothbrush from his mouth. “It’s open.” He called out through the minty foam.

“Oh.” The door opened not a moment later, and Lois poked her head in. “Are you nearly ready?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Clark said in between swipes of the toothbrush. He glanced at his watch and saw they had plenty of time. “You’re in a hurry today.”

Lois pressed her lips together. “Perry said there would be cake at the office.”

Clark laughed, nearly choking on the toothpaste. “I didn’t realise cake was that big of a motivator for you.”

Lois smiled at that. “It usually isn’t but God, the baby is making me crave sweet things, like crazy.” She looked down at her bump, bringing her hands to it. “And the point still remains, I want to get there early to eat my fill of cake, and then sit at my desk and do nothing for the day.”

Clark bent over and spit out the toothpaste. He rinsed his mouth and approached Lois at the door. “What a wonderful way to spend your birthday.” He said as he set his hands on either side of her stomach.

“Hey, I can’t drink, and I can’t even stay up past eight before I start to feel sleepy. Cake is all I have.”

“I did get some fish in for dinner tonight, so we can at least have a nice meal to celebrate.” At Lois’ grimace, he continued. “I also got you the biggest gateau I could find.”

Lois gave a sly smile. “Good boy.” She whispered as she stood up on her tiptoes and placed a soft kiss against his lips. She then made her way over to the shoe rail and picked up her loafers before going to the couch and falling into the cushions with a sigh. “I swear once my maternity starts I’m going to become one with this couch. I can see it now, just two more months and then it’s me and this bad boy till the end.”

“If you sit on it till your due date you really will become one with it.” Without another word, Clark took the shoes from her hand and crouched down to put them on for her.

She crossed her arms and raised her foot to Clark. “Not with my personal servant I won’t. Considering *you* did this to me, hoisting me up from the sofa every evening is getting off lightly.”

“True." Clark said, slipping on the shoe before reaching for the other foot. “Though it does beg the question of what your last servent died of.”

Lois swatted his head for that, to which Clark only grinned. He stood up then and after a quick burst around the apartment, returned to her, dressed and ready. “Alright, you good to go?”

She eyed him for a second before holding her hands up, Clark took them and gently eased her to her feet. “You'd think after all this time, i’d be used to the super powers by now, but nope.” She shook her head. “Still crazy.”

“You know when the baby’s born there is going to be two of us, right?" Clark smiled, leaning in close and kissing her forehead. “Another little kryptonian running around the place...”

“Oh God, don’t remind me…” She muttered. “But hey, maybe he’ll be human, you don't know.” She looked up at him, her eyes bright with hope. “Maybe he will just crawl around and I won't have to worry about him flying through the apartment.”

“Sure Lois, sure.” Clark said before slipping on his own shoes. “Now come on, the cake’s awaiting.”

The drive over was like it always was, there was traffic, but they didn’t have to sit in it for too long. After Clark parked the car and helped Lois from it, and they made their way upstairs and upon opening the doors to the office, streamers flew towards them as well as the voices of their colleagues. “Happy birthday, Lois!”

Within seconds, Lois started to cry as she approached her desk. “You guys…” She sobbed. It was a rare sight to see Lois cry, but with the baby, her emotions were as turbulent as ever and this morning was no exception.

After setting her bag down she approached the table in the middle of the room, and looked at her cake. It had already been divided into portions, with some having already been taken, but the part that held the words ‘Happy Birthday Lois!’ was intact. Lois tilted her head at it, and all at once the tears stopped.

“Coconut, Perry?” Lois sighed “You got *coconut* ?”

Perry pulled the fork from his mouth, his face awash with dismay. “But you love coconut!”

“Yeah, not at the moment she doesn’t." Clark said, side stepping her and picking himself up a piece for himself. He took a bite. It was nice, if a little sweet.

“Food aversions, eh?” Perry nodded sagely. “Alice had the same thing with Jerry. Wouldn’t touch chicken for months.” He sighed. “Worst part was I was gonna go for chocolate but at the last second I

changed the order. Sorry Lois, next baby i'll remember."

"*Next* baby?" Clark sputtered, a few flecks of cake coming out of his mouth. "Perry, the *first* baby isn't even here yet."

He swatted his hand at Clark. "Please, I know you two, after the first one you're gonna go baby mad. I can see you having five, at least."

"*Five?* " Lois and Clark said at the same time.

"I see it too, to be honest." Jimmy said, looking thoughtful as he took another bite. "Five little Lois and Clark's running around the place."

Clark grimaced. He was just about able to wrap his head around one baby thanks to seeing Dinah for the past few months, but even he was sure she wasn't capable of convincing him he'd be able to handle *five* kids. When he noticed Lois' concerned stare on him, he put on his best smile. "I think we're good with one baby for now."

"Exactly." Lois said, and despite her earlier complaints she took a plate of cake, though only picked at the frosting.

"I dunno." Jimmy said, leaning back in his chair. "In my head you gotta have at least three. One child is just gonna get lonely."

"Can we maybe not talk about this right now?" Clark said, and despite his best efforts his voice came out high and reedy. "I mean, just that it's Lois' birthday and the baby isn't even due for another--"

"No, no." Lois said softly, bringing her hand to the small of his back. "I agree, I'm gonna hear nothing but baby talk right up until he's born, so i'd rather talk about other things on my birthday if it's all the same to you guys."

Clark took a deep breath, and thankfully conversation turned to other things. Once the cake was

finished and Perry good will for the day started to dwindle, they were back at their desks, though Lois did indeed fulfill her promise to do nothing and Clark joined her, not because he had nothing to do, but because it was a rare treat to enjoy his wife's company at work. Either they'd both be busy or one would have an assignment in need of their attention, and even on the occasions they were both free, Perry would be out of his office like a shot if he noticed a quiet spell. Today however, was a rare opportunity where Perry was being slightly more lax towards them and Clark took full advantage of it.

Clark opened his desk and pulled out a packet of marshmallows. There were other packets of candy within, but he knew Lois was in a marshmallow mood today and sure enough the moment he waved the packet, she turned her head at the sound, ignoring the game of solitaire she was currently playing and gasped. “No way. You have marshmallows?”

“Yup.” Clark said, opening the packet and handing her one. They were large, like apples, and she immediately brought it to her lips and bit down on it.

She moaned. “God, these are *so* good.” She paused her chewing, her eyes narrowing at him. “How did you know I wanted marshmallows?”

“You’re my wife, Lois.” He said, resting his head on his hand and watching her.

She finished the first marshmallow and reached for another. “Still, *I* didn’t even know I wanted marshmallows until I saw them.”

“It's one of my superpowers.” Clark said instead, and Lois rolled her eyes.

“Don’t say that, I might actually believe you.”

“Who says i'm lying?" Clark said, smiling.

Lois shook her head with a smile, and reached for another marshmallow.

As Clark looked back at this moment, he wondered how everything went so wrong from here. How could it have happened on today of all days. Surely, the world could have chosen another time to end. Any other day of the year, at any other place in the world even. But no, it chose today, and as Clark watches his wife eat her last marshmallow, he knows his world will be ending soon enough.

A rumble struck the office, and Clark was up like a shot. He went to Lois and covered her head as he looked up at the ceiling. Despite the movement, nothing crashed down. Even the windows held steady and Clark let out a breath. The room was now alive with voices and Perry burst from his office. “Earthquake!” He yelled.

But the rumble was already gone, and Jimmy was the one to call out to him above the smattering of voices. “Little late on the draw on that one, Perry.”

Perry rolled his eyes. “I want everyone to be prepared in case--”

But Perry didn’t get to finish his sentence. Another rumble hit, stronger than the first and Lois gasped as her chair jolted to the side, Clark stopped her from falling over and as a panel from the ceiling came down, he swatted it away before it could hit her. Perry yelled ‘Brace!’ through the chaos and Clark watched as his coworkers did just that and scrambled under their desks. He held Lois’ steady and nothing more seemed to fall even as the rumble kept going.

Once the movement had stopped, he could hear the panicked sobs throughout the room, could see Lois’ face devoid of colour before him. She turned her head to him, her eyes wide. “Is that it?” She asked quietly.

Clark however could barely hear her. His ears were in the bay, and the sound of a roaring wave hit him. “Tsunami.” He muttered.

Lois’ mouth fell open, and Clark reached for her hands. “Brace under the desk, I’ll change and then come back for you.”

“No, i'll be fine here, just focus on everyone else.” She said, already easing herself off her seat.

Clark looked to her, and despite the brave expression she put on, he could see her hands clinging to her stomach. Clark swallowed. “Fuck it. I'll get you out now.”

“No!” She said firmly. “I'll be fine here. Now go! The city needs Superman right now, Lois Kent can wait.”

As people slowly peaked out from their desks, Clark ran past them all. Ignoring their calls, he got to the stairway. Despite the quakes, there were people already there trying to go downstairs. Clark yelled to them as he ran. “Tsunami. Get to the upper floors.”

“What?” One of them asked. “How do you know?”

“I just do, okay?” He yelled. “Now go upstairs!”

Once at the bottom he found the front desk and ignored the complaints of the receptionist as he reached for the microphone. He switched it on. “Tsunami incoming, everyone get to the upper floors now. This is not a drill.” He set the microphone down, and with only a look to the receptionist still hunkered underneath the desk, she started to move, scrambling out from her spot and rushing to the stairway.

He could hear movement throughout the building. People had heeded his warning. Now it was time to focus on everyone else. He rushed from the building.

He changed into his suit not a moment later, and despite the rumbling of the wave ever present in his ears as well as the sound of Lois' elevated heartbeat, he was able to focus; finding people trapped under debris from the quake and instructing them to get to higher ground.

As he flew the warning sirens started to blare. But it was too late. The wave was almost here, and even as people began to move as high up as they could, Clark still had to fly around helping those who were struggling.

He heard a scream from below and when he turned his head he saw the cause. The horizon was moving now. A line of water was coming towards the city and without another thought, Clark flew down to the source of the scream. It was a mother with her two sons. One of them had their leg caught under a chunk of stone and the other boy was trying to push it off. Clark flew down to them and lifted it up with ease, before throwing it to the side. He carried them all onto a roof top and set them down. The boys clung to their mother, as she sobbed and thanked him.

But Clark didn't have time to spare, he flew away again and kept going, kept moving, and even as the wave hit the shores and the screams grew louder and louder, he still kept moving.

Buildings collapsed, and people were swept away despite Clark's best efforts. Even though he knew he shouldn't do it, he found Lois' heartbeat through it all, and heard it spike.

He wanted to go to her, but no matter where he went there were calls for help, and the sound of people taking their last water filled breath filled his ears. Lois would be fine. He told himself. She will be fine.

As water swept the streets and moved further inland, he heard it impact the Planet. He held his breath and waited for what would happen next. As the water moved past, it held strong, and Clark clung to that. It would be fine, everyone was in the upper floors, and Lois was there, safe and sound with them.

Then he heard the sound of crumbling.

He flew towards it, pulling people out of the water that had survived the wave as he went. As he lifted one girl out, he saw a mers hand clinging to her leg. He reached for those claws and broke them, before flying the girl away and setting her down on a rooftop.

He noticed them more as he flew, people in the water fending off the mers that swam in after the wave. If it wasn't the water killing people, it was the mers swimming within it.

But Clark didn't have time to help everyone, no matter how fast he seemed to move, more and more the sound of crumbling concrete and shattering glass haunted him and by the time he found the Planet, he let out a choked gasp at what he saw.

The windows were gone, and the building was starting to lean. He could hear people rushing from the top floors downwards to the impact zone and despite his warning he could see the bodies trapped in the lower floors. The water was so high that it had reached his floor, sitting not even five feet away from the window he usually looked out of to take in the Metropolis skyline, which in this moment, no longer existed.

He flew around the building, looking for Lois, and when he found her he could feel his heart stop. She was hanging from the side, her feet mere inches above the torrent of water.

A mers hand stretched out from the waves, holding her foot.

She was soaked, and as Clark flew towards her, he screamed her name, his eyes burning red as he killed the mer trying to pull her in.

The mers slipped back into the waves and as he disappeared, Lois let out a single scream as she lost her grip.

She fell into the water, and that's when Clark heard it.

A snap.

He stilled.

"*No*." He cried out.

A choked breath was the only response he received.

He descended to where she landed. Her head remained above the water, and Clark realised why as he brought his hand to her neck. There, beneath her, lay a portion of collapsed wall and the more he looked at it, the more his vision grew hazy.

All sound ceased. There was only a blanket of white noise that shielded him from everything around him. Clark stared at her face, at her closed eyes and willed them open. Yet no matter how much he prayed, it didn't happen. Her eyes remained closed and as time ticked ever onward, Clark sat there holding onto Lois' limp hand. "Lois?" He whispered, despite knowing there would only be silence.

He listened for her heartbeat, and when nothing came, he called her name again. Maybe he just didn't hear her. That had to be it.

“Lois?” He repeated as he shook her shoulder gently.

“Please, answer me…” he choked out, shaking her shoulder more. “I’m here now, you’re gonna be fine. I’m gonna get you someplace safe.”

Yet, even then she remained silent. As the minutes ticked by, he knew he couldn’t stay here. More buildings crumbled, and more people entered the water, screaming for help, but Clark didn’t care anymore. He just had to get Lois out of here. He had to get her somewhere safe and then everything would be fine.

He scooped her up and flew.

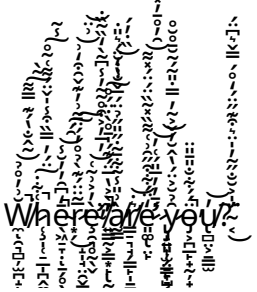
He didn’t know where.

But he flew.

And flew.

And flew.

“Shh. Lois.” He muttered. “You’re okay. I’m getting you somewhere safe. You and Jon are gonna be safe.”



“I’m right here.” He said, down at her lifeless face. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Something was pawing at his face.

Clark’s eyes slowly slid open, and when they did, for a brief moment he could have sworn it was Lois he saw before him. She had that sleepy smile she’d always wear as she’d wake him up in the morning. He could even feel the soft linen of their bed sheets, see the skyline in the window behind her.

But as his vision cleared, someone else came into view and he let out a sigh as he sat up. “Oh.” Clark muttered. “It's you.”

At Blue’s frown, Clark shook his head. “I just meant--” he sighed. “Never mind, I don't know what I meant.”

Blue remained quiet, not even offering a snide chirp that Clark was somewhat expecting. He simply sat next to him, staring at the plaque on the floor. He brought his hand to it, touching the surface, and Clark wondered if he was trying to read the words etched there.

“It’s a grave.” Clark said, and at the words Blue’s ears twitched. “My wife and son… They’re buried here.”

Clark would have wondered if Blue understood those words, but the way his eyes grew sad as he turned to look at Clark told him that he had. He chirped, and moved closer to Clark, his hand reaching for his.

Clark let him take a hold of it, and he squeezed his fingers in return, staring down at the blue skin and sharp claws. “It’s coming up on four years since I lost them, and yet the pain is still there. Still fresh.” Clark closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. “I thought i’d get over it eventually. When my Ma and Pa died, it hurt, but not as much as this. I suppose ‘cause with them, it didn’t feel like I had a choice.”

“I had a choice with Lois. If I had done things differently that day. I wouldn’t be here right now and she would be alive.” At the words, Clark chanced a look at the mer and didn’t miss the hurt on his face.

“But what would have been the cost? I know what she would have said had I flown her far away before the wave hit. Every person who died that day would have sat on her conscious. But despite that, I knew she *wanted* me to save her. She was waiting for it. Knew I’d be coming back and yet...”

He pulled his hand free, bringing it to his face to wipe away the tears. “If I just been a few seconds faster, she’d be alive. If I hadn't left her there, she’d be alive.” Clark even wondered if he hadn’t met her if she’d be alive. Maybe in another world that was the case. Maybe there was even another world there was a version of him that had been just a second faster.

And yet, as he looked at the mer, he felt his heart swell and he leant closer to him, letting his head rest on his shoulder. “But that’s not what happened, and I need to deal with that.” He took another breath. “I really want to get better. I'm not an idiot. I know what i’m doing isn’t healthy; that the way I think is a psychologists nightmare. I also know the first part of dealing with an issue is addressing it.”

‘But Dinah… What if I’m terrible? What if I do everything wrong?’

‘Clark, that's part of the experience, besides Lois will be right there beside you. Once the baby is born, you’ll find that all of these worries are going to disappear.’

‘But what about until then? Seven months of worry and then what? What if it doesn’t go away?’

‘Well how about this, focus on each of those fears. Look at them all individually and focus on one at a time. Worried you’ll feed him wrong? Watch some videos and learn. Worried you’ll not be able to console him when he cries? Read a few parenting books. If you don’t separate these problems you’ll feel overwhelmed. Once they’re separated, they suddenly become a lot easier to handle.’

As the memory faded, Clark turned to the mer. “Do you ever hear voices in your head?” He asked. Blue pondered those words before offering a single nod. “See, I've heard Lois’ voice in my head ever since she died. At first she’d talk like how I knew she would, say things I knew she’d say, but after a while, it changed. She stopped sounding like herself. She started sounding like my worst fears; my worst thoughts. I knew it wasn’t her talking, but it was like I couldn’t stop my mind from doing it. She’d call me out whenever I did something bad. But it wouldn’t be what I thought she’d think was bad. It was all me.”

“Take you for instance. Lois never hated mers. She wasn’t an activist or anything, but she never said she hated them. And yet, every time I think about you, that little voice that sounds like her tells me to stop. To end things.”

“But I know now that voice wasn’t her. It was me. Honestly, I think she’d find you hilarious. Like when you messed with my clothes. She did the same thing when I accidentally washed my red shirt with her whites. She threw my ties off the balcony and I had to go down to the streets and pick them up and even then, she said it didn’t make up for all the ‘huh Lois, pink shirt again?’ comments she got at work.”

“The point i’m trying to make is that. I want to get better. It will take a long time, I know, but the first step of dealing with a problem is admitting you have one, right? So that’s what I’m doing. I’m not over Lois, that much I know, and to deal with that I have to just… Change the way I think about her.” He thought of Marcos' visit, to his words and he swallowed. “I want to believe she would be proud of me. Even if I didn’t always make the best choices. It’s like Marcos said, it was hard getting up every morning for the past three years, and I like to think she'd be proud of me for doing just that. But... I will say, something made it easier these past few months.”

“Which leads me to this...” Clark took Blue’s hand and held it tight. “Lois, this is Blue, he’s an asshole and I sort of hate him, but he’s the best thing in my life right now and I’m sure you’d have enjoyed how much he torments me.”

In the end, they sat there for nearly an hour. With Blue eventually laying down and letting his head rest on Clark’s lap. He didn’t rush him, which Clark was grateful for. He needed just a little more time here, and having someone other than the ghosts of memories for company was refreshing.

As he felt his hunger grow, as well as noticed Blue getting fidgety, he took a deep breath and eased the mer up right before standing up. He scooped him into his arms and with a quiet goodbye, went back to the cabin.

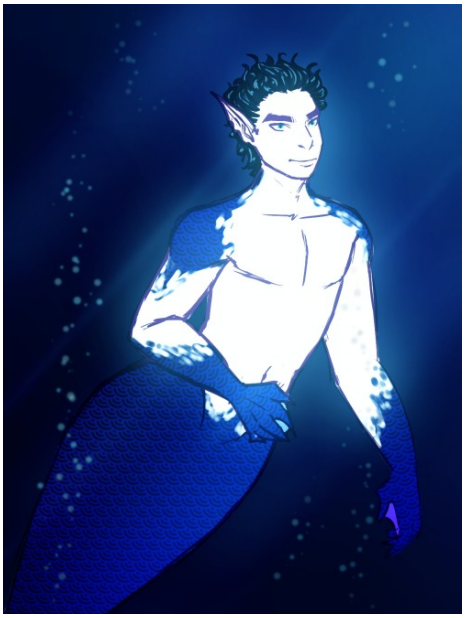
After eating, he spent the rest of the day making sure his home looked at least somewhat presentable. It was hard, and he had to leave the door open to try and get some air in to dry the place out, but eventually it looked okay, and he finished by setting the picture frame that had toppled off his desk back in its rightful place.

His parents and Lois smiled up at him and when the usual burst of guilt threatened to spill forth, he took a deep breath. She wouldn't be mad, he told himself, she'd be proud of you if she could see you right now.

~~*You just have to be strong, and keep moving forward, okay?*~~

He let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding and at the words he felt his eyes water. That was the Lois he knew, not his thoughts wearing her voice. All at once, he felt lighter and he turned and walked out onto the beach.

It would take time, he knew that. But one day he hoped to get better. Like Lois said, he just had to keep moving forward.



Chapter End Notes

ALL ABOARD THE FEELS TRAIN. CHOO CHOO!

What a roller coaster, eh? You guys must have been riding high from the kiss, and then I just came along and smacked y'all the back of the heads with pure feels XD

Is there more to that day in Metropolis that Clark is still repressing? Who knows. Who knows indeed (°ʖ°). But what is important is that he is getting better, slowly but surely, and now things are looking a little brighter in his life.

At least for now (°ʖ°)

Kidding! Everything is sunshine and rainbows from here on out!

... (°ʖ°)

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter! As well as the art! :D In the chapter is a piece I did for the boys first kiss which you can also find on my Tumblr Batman-Katflap , and at the bottom are pieces created by the wonderful paxpaxdraws (the piece on the left) and kuween (the piece on the right) of Blue! They are both so beautiful, I can't even express my love for them enough <3 -w- <3 As always, catch you all next time. Take care! :D

Chapter 19

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 29th 2016

After yesterday, Clark wasn't expecting too much to change between himself and the mer. He knew they had entered into new territory, sure, but for some reason it didn't feel as unfamiliar as he expected it to. The mer was still the mer. Clark was still Clark. He had a name now, sure, but all that really did was make it easier for Clark to chastise him.

Such as this morning, when he awoke to a fishy lump on top of him.

"Blue. Get off." Clark muttered as he wiped the sleep from his eyes. "Come on. Get. You weigh a ton."

Not that that made a difference to Clark. Really, Blue could weigh double and it still would be as ineffectual as a small door mouse would be, and yet, it felt right to gripe. Just because they had kissed, didn't give the mer the right to clamber on top of him during the night and all but suffocate him.

Despite this, Clark didn't push him off, didn't do much other than grumble half heartedly, which of course wasn't going to do much to dissuade the mer.

Which incidentally was exactly what happened. Even at Clark's comment, Blue remained a half conscious lump on top of him. Clark brought his hands to his sides, poking along the muscle there, hoping to perhaps illicit any sort of response to try and move him. When his hands reached his underarms, a thought struck him. Were mers ticklish? *Only one way to find out*, he thought to himself.

He wiggled his fingers against the skin there and Blue jolted up, suddenly wide awake.

Clark only grinned. "So you *are* ticklish."

Blue's face grew red, as he chirped and swiped at Clark's hands. "Oh, i'm sorry, did you *not* want me to keep doing that?"

The mer nodded, and Clark nodded with him. "So you *do* want me to keep tickling you?"

Blue sputtered before hissing. He then proceeded to grumble as he slipped off the bed and into his tub. Once inside, he crossed his arms, using his hands to hold onto his sides. Clark's grin only grew. "Hey, don't pout…" he muttered with a slight laugh as he watched the mer's mouth press into a line beneath the water.

"Alright, alright, I'm sorry." Clark said as he sat up. "I won't tickle you again."

The mer's ears pricked up at that and he turned a hopeful glance towards Clark.

"Unless you refuse to get off me again." Clark added.

Blue's frown returned.

Clark laughed again, before getting off of the bed and stretching. "Alright. Be right back."

The mer didn't object to Clark leaving. For one, it wasn't like he was going anywhere. He used his outhouse, gave himself a quick wash, and in less that ten minutes was making his way back inside. It was upon his return and opening his dresser however, that he saw the state of his clothes and sighed. "Maybe I should finally get some new stuff…" he said to himself as he riffled through the old and worn shirts. He then turned to Blue. "What do you think?"

The mer poked his head out of the water until his lips were just above it. He chirped, his head quirking to his side.

"Well, it's just that my clothes have seen better days…" Clark said as he sent a foux glare the mer's way. At that, Blue returned a sheepish grin. "To be fair, they were ruined before you even got your

claws on ‘em. I need new clothes, have done for a while, so…” he sighed. “I guess it's time to open it.”

Clark crouched down on the floor and ran his fingers along one of the wooden planks until he found the end. He lifted it, and as there were no nails keeping it in place, it came up easily. Underneath was a small metal box, covered in a dusting of dirt and sand. Clark reached for it and blew the worst of the debris off of it. He then stood up and made his way to his desk, falling into the seat. He opened the drawer there, his hand grazing over his journal and contact book still within, if a little water damaged from the rain. He then found what he was looking for; the unassuming paperweight he had thrown in there. He picked it up.

“Now then.” He said as he set the box down on the desk. He turned his attention to the paperweight in his hand. It was made out of concrete as that was what Clark had used when setting the foundations of his cabin. He had a little left over, and after sealing away the contents of the box underneath his home, he placed the key to it within the concrete, before molding it into a small ball.

It was partly to try and dissuade him from opening it easily. Yes, he could simply break open the box, but he also liked to think he had a bit more control than that. With the key inside the concrete, it acted as a reminder that what it opened was to only be opened as a last resort.

He gripped either side of the concrete, and with a slightly twist of the wrists, it split in half. Laying perfectly in the middle was the key. Clark grimaced when he noticed that the concrete had filled the notches of the metal. “Oh.” He muttered as he dug the key out using his finger nails. The idea that this wasn't the smartest thing he had ever done, came to him. But he chose to ignore it.

Once free, the concrete was still in the ridges despite Clark’s best efforts. He brought it to the lock, all as the mer watched him with rapt attention. Sure enough, the key no longer worked. So with a frown, Clark simply covered the lock with his hand and made an attempt at opening it, all while crushing the lock within his fist. “Ta da.” He said with a nervous laugh towards the mer. He brought the now destroyed lock away, and set the useless key down next to it.

Clark supposed it didn’t really matter, wasn’t as if anything was going to rob him.

For inside the box were bundles of notes. Blue chirped as he sat up further to try and get closer to the box, peering over the side of the tub towards it and Clark. “This is money.” Clark said, lifting one of the wads of notes.

He had somewhat lied to Marcos about his money troubles. Whilst he was not a millionaire or anything, he wasn't as broke as he seemed to portray himself by living in his shack. For one, he and Lois were intending to buy a house at some point after the baby was born, and were saving up accordingly. After the quake, Clark doesn't remember much about what he did after getting to the island. He just knew at some point he flew to another city and took out a large sum of his savings, but beyond that, things were still fuzzy.

This also wasn't all of his money. He still had a bank account, which he assumed was still open, but like the key, the added steps he would have to go through to access it meant he didn't really have any motivation to do so. Maybe one day he would, but for now, he was okay with the amount he currently had stashed.

"Alright." Clark said, taking out a bundle of notes before closing the box and putting it back under the plank. He quickly threw on the pieces of clothing he intended on keeping, and resolved that everything else was going to get burnt. "I think I'm good to go. You gonna be okay here?"

Blue looked up at Clark before chirping and pointing out towards the door. Clark turned to it, and nodded. "Yeah, I'm going to be gone for a little while. You want me to carry you to the water?"

Surprisingly, Blue shook his head, pulling himself up and out of the tub before shimmying his way out the door and to the sand. Clark raised a brow whilst following along next to him. "This is rare, usually you do your princess act. After all, crawling along the floor is too good for his highness."

Blue looked up at him, and something close to mischief came across his face as he stopped and rolled onto his back. He reached up for Clark, who only laughed. "God, really? The water is right there." he said, gesturing to the lapping shore not even ten feet away from them.

Blue only shook his head, and even began to open and close his hands as he lay on his back. Clark sighed. "I should have just kept quiet…" he muttered with a smile. He bent over, reaching for the mers sides. But before he could lift him, Blue's face darted forward, his mouth pressing against Clark's. He then pulled back with a small smirk.

Clark's opened his mouth, perhaps in the hopes of saying something witty, but instead only let out a stream of half syllables, before ending on a shallow breath. His face was beet red as he lifted Blue up and walked the ten feet to the water. He set him down in the frothy waves, but the mer didn't go into the water immediately, opting to sit in the waves and look up at Clark, who only looked away from him, out across the water. "If you wanted a kiss, you could have just asked..."

Clark realised the problem in that logic the moment the words left him and sure enough, when he looked at the mer his face was less than impressed. “You know what I mean,” he continued with a roll of the eyes. “I just meant, you don’t have to like, surprise me, you can just…” Clark swallowed thickly, before crouching down to meet the mer’s line of sight, then, slowly, he edged forward and placed a single kiss on his forehead. He pulled back and looked at the mer. “Like that.”

A smile began to spread across the mer's lips, and with more zeal than Clark was expecting he darted forward again, his lips going to Clark’s own forehead. He then pulled back, tilting his head in question.

Clark coughed, looking away. “Yeah, that was…” he opened his mouth, hoping for something more poignant to come forth, but when nothing did he settled on, “nice.” He finished with a small smile of his own.

He then stood up. “Alright, i'll be back in a little while, stay near the island and don’t cause trouble." Clark said, adding the last part upon noticing the sharks swimming near the whale again. Despite there not being much meat left on the thing, there was always a swarm of something or another feeding on it still.

Blue didn’t nod, but didn’t give his usual derisive chirp either, so Clark assumed he was going to listen to him, and Hell, if he didn’t, he would be the one having to deal with another bite, not Clark.

After making his way to the jetty, Clark hopped onto his boat, and made his way to Cottonwood.

Perhaps a normal individual would have exercised caution about returning to the island that inhabited individuals that had tried to kill him.

But Clark wasn’t normal and as such it was with a smile and wave that he greeted Steve on the dock upon his arrival.

There was a lot of activity in the area when he moored, and Steve was among one of the people there. Upon seeing Clark however, the man ducked his head and left so quickly he stumbled across the

boardwalk. He wondered if he'd see Antonio or Colin whilst he was here, but decided to let fate decide if that would be the case.

As he walked through the docks, he spied Porter within his office. He was writing at his desk and Clark debated going inside to say hello, but given the mountain of paperwork beside him and the general business of the place, he figured now wasn't the best time.

Instead he kept walking, and as he passed the Ole Sal's he paused. It was open, but a quick glance inside revealed there was only one person at the counter.

Clark stepped inside, and immediately Marcos' eyes went to him, they blew wide in shock, and Clark could see the redness in them. He didn't speak, his mouth only bobbing open and closed.

"Hey." Clark offered.

Marcos' eyes started to water, and he stood up on shaky legs. "Clark, I'm--"

Before he could begin the speech Clark could feel coming, he held up his hand. "Don't apologize." He said, approaching the counter. "You did what you had to do. I'm okay and nobody got hurt."

Marcos brought his hands to his eyes and wiped them, sniffling. "I knew you'd be okay, but I was so worried. I should have warned you but I--"

"I told you." Clark said firmly, moving closer. "I'm okay, so don't worry about it." He stopped just in front of Marcos, bringing his hand up to rest on his shoulders. "How are you doing?"

Marcos looked up at him with glassy eyes, and slowly he pressed forward until his face was against Clark's chest. "My dad..." he whispered so quietly, even Clark struggled to hear it. "He's… He's--"

"I know." Clark said as gently as he could. He slid his hands along his shoulders before wrapping them around him. Like this, he seemed so much smaller. Clark wondered how he ever thought he wasn't just a kid. "Where is he?" He asked, looking around the empty building.

“Redding.” Marcos muttered. “He’s staying there with a friend whilst he goes through chemo.”

“And you’re running the shop alone?”

“Have to.” Marcos said, swallowing thickly, as though sensing Clark’s next question, he only said one more word. “Bills.”

“Right.” Clark said with a frown.

For a while, neither spoke. Clark rubbed gentle circles into Marcos’ back as the other stood, and let out tears that Clark knew were long time coming. Eventually though, Marcos pulled back, wiping his eyes and sending a watery smile up towards Clark. “Thanks, I needed that.”

“Of course.” Clark said with a nod. “You know where I am if you need another.”

Marcos smiled at that, but it barely touched his eyes and was accompanied with a small shrug. “Don’t know if i'm gonna have any time to visit, but when I do, i'll take you up on that.”

Clark made a face, as he crossed his arms. “Then I guess I'll just have to come here more.”

Those glassy eyes met him once more. “Really?” Marcos asked quietly.

“Sure, not like I’ve got much else going on in my life. Blue’s pretty low maintenance when he’s not doing his princess act.”

That caused a raised eyebrow. “Blue?”

Clark opened his mouth to respond, before it snapped back shut. “I meant the mer.”

Marcos however only laughed. “No no. It's a nice name.” He said, trying to obscure his smile with his hand. “It suits him.”

Clark however could still feel his cheeks burning red. “Yeah...” He said after failing to find any other words.

Marcos nodded at that, and perhaps sensed there were no other words that would be coming along. He let out a breath and went back to his stool. “It was nice chatting Clark. I guess i’ll see you next time, then.”

“Yeah…” Clark repeated, his mind still flustered. He then cleared his throat. “Yeah, i’ll drop by in a week or so, see how you’re doing.”

“I mean, don’t feel like you have to. Even if you just came by for my birthday, that would be cool.” Marcos said shyly

“Right.” Clark said, clapping his hands together. “You said it was in August. What day? I’ll make sure I'm free.”

“The 17th.”

Clark wasn’t aware that hearing a date could punch him so thoroughly in the gut, and yet the pain and breathlessness he was feeling felt an awful lot like it. “The 17th?” He repeated.

Marcos’ looked away, as he waved his hand. “You know never mind, if you can’t make it, it’s--”

“No, no.” Clark blurted, before shoving his hands into his pockets to try and stop the trembling. “It's just…” he began, swallowing thickly. “That’s Lois’ birthday.”

The 17th would mark four years since he lost her. Would mark four years since he moved to his island and forwent his old life. The idea of doing anything other than lay in bed and wallow on that day seemed impossible, and yet, he tried to think of what he had promised to do only yesterday. He had been so hopeful he would be able to change his ways, to not remain stuck in the past and be ruled by it. Maybe this was his chance to do just that, maybe he would finally be able to spend a birthday how it was supposed to be celebrated.

So it was as he looked at Marcos' somber expression that he gave a single nod. "I'll be there," he said firmly.

Marcos however only shook his head. "No, no. If you're busy or you don't want to, don't feel like you have to just because I--"

"No." Clark said, with that same unwavering resolve. "I'll be here."

With that, it was only a few quiet goodbyes that were shared before Clark made his way outside.

It was as he walked down the main shopping street that he realised he was on autopilot, making his way to Lucy's and having to forcibly stop himself as he passed a small clothing shop. It reminded him why he was there in the first place, so with a sigh he walked inside.

He didn't like shopping for clothes at the best times. Truthfully, Lois used to buy his clothes for him after they were married, mostly as Clark had the fashion sense of a walnut, but also because taking the time to do something as trivial as choosing clothing seemed like a waste of time to him. Now however, he knew he had to do it, and so he went around the rails and dutifully picked up a few shirts he thought looked nice.

He also bought new pants, and underwear, and even some sandals that looked comfortable. The prices were a little on the high side, but like most of the shops in Cottonwood, it looked like it didn't get much business. So much so, that when Clark unloaded his arms onto the counter the cashier looked to almost burst with joy. "Is that everything for you, sir?" She asked, as she began to ring it all up.

"Yeah, I guess." He said, looking around the place once more. "I think I got everything I needed. Not like I really need all that much."

“Would you like to take a look at our jewelry?” She asked as she gestured to the glass cabinet beside the cash register. “We have a sale on them at the moment.”

“I don't really wear…” Clark began, but as he looked into the cabinet his eyes caught one piece. “What's that?” He asked, pointing at the bracelet he spied.

The woman paused her movements and looked into the cabinet, following Clark’s finger. “Oh, that piece. It's beautiful isn't it? It's pure silver, and the gemstones are aquamarines.”

“How much is it?” Clark asked, his eyes still focusing on the gems.

“It was seven hundred dollars, but at the moment it's down to four hundred.”

Clark pulled out his bundles of notes, and flicked through them. It would use up a lot of the money he’d brought with him, and yet... “I'll take it.”

The sales assistant nodded vigorously as she opened the cabinet and took out the bracelet. She then packed it into a small blue box. Clark paid for his goods and left soon after. Once outside, he looked at the remainder of his money. Just enough for some groceries.

After walking into Lucy’s he had expected to see her behind the counter, but today she wasn’t there. Instead it was the girl he occasionally saw manning the register. They hadn’t really spoken to one another beyond Clark asking if Lucy was around, but this time upon asking, the girl only shook her head. “She’s visiting a friend.” She said.

“Oh.” Clark said, barely concealing his disappointment. At the girl’s face, he brought up his hand. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to sound like a dick.”

“Well.” The girl said, fighting a smile. “I wasn’t going to say…”

“Sorry again, I guess I was just looking forward to chatting with Luce.” Clark said, picking up a basket.

“Yeah, she looks forward to your talks, too.” The girl said. “She’s gonna be mad when she finds out you dropped by when she was out.”

Clark smiled at that, and began putting a few things into his basket. As the minutes passed he poked his head from out of the aisle and called out to the girl. “You know, i’ve been coming here a while, and I still don’t know your name.”

“It’s Barbara.” The girl said, swiping a strand of her red hair behind her ear. “I’m Lucy’s niece.”

“Right.” Clark said with a nod. “I’m Clark, by the way.”

“I know.” She said with a smile.

“Right, of course.” Clark said, shaking his head. “Sorry.”

“Hey, no need to apologize.” Barbara said, waving her hand. “I don't know every customer's name or anything, it’s like I said, my aunt talks about you a lot.”

“Good things I hope.” Clark said, approaching the counter and setting his basket down.

“She says she can trust you.” Barbara said, her eyes taking on a quality Clark couldn't place. “So yeah, very good things.” She continued.

Clark couldn't help it, he looked away from those eyes with a faint blush. “I got her out of a tight jam a while back, that's all.”

“If you say so.” Was all she said, as she started ringing up and packing Clark’s shopping.

At that he stood in silence as Barbara finished ringing up his goods. Once they were packed up, she handed the bag over and Clark placed a few notes on the counter. Barbara counted them up before opening the register and taking a few coins out and setting them down in return. “Thank you for shopping with us. I'll let my aunt know you said hi.”

“Thanks, Barbara.” He said with a nod. “Be seeing you.”

As he stepped back outside onto the high street, it was just as a large vehicle drove past. Soon to be followed by a few more. Clark watched them pass, hearing the ground rumble as they moved. He went to walk away then, only to feel something or more accurately someone bump into him.

Papers fell to the floor, only to be whipped up by the breeze. Clark went after them, easily scooping them up with his free hand. The person who had bumped into him was still dazed on the floor. He righted his askew glasses as he looked up at Clark. He cleared his throat and hopped back onto his feet. “You should watch where you are going.” He said as he dusted himself off.

Clark frowned. “I was standing still. *You* might not wanna read whilst walking instead.” He said as he held the bundle of papers out towards the man.

The man lost whatever attitude he had at that, opting instead for a sheepish look. “You might have a point there. Sorry about that.”

Clark shrugged. “It's not a big deal.” As he said the words, another vehicle drove past and Clark watched it go. “That’s like the third one…” Clark muttered to himself.

The man noticed. “Ah, you mean the trucks? We have a lot of supplies that need moving you see. I assure you they won’t be a nuisance though. We will keep construction to social hours only.”

There was a lot to pick apart there, but Clark started with, “Supplies?” he asked, raising a brow. “For what?”

“For construction.” The man said, rearranging the papers in his hands. “I’m a developer. I currently have a few projects underway here in Cottonwood.”

Recognition hit him. “Walter, right?”

The man frowned at that, before it quickly turned into a grin. “Right! So you’ve heard of me? Can I

ask from where? If it was in Manton, I will say I have a few properties still for sale there that I'm willing to negotiate the price of if--" But he cut himself off with a sharp sign. "Forgive me, I'm getting ahead of myself, I still don't know your name."

"It's Clark. Clark Kent." He said, and at Walter's nod, he continued. "Lucy mentioned there was someone who brought Tom's farm for a housing development."

"And right you are, though I wouldn't say i'm making houses, my plans for the land are rather more… opulent."

"Right, i heard that." Clark pursed his lips. "And as that's the case, I wish you luck selling them."

Walter however didn't look put off by the sentiment, instead sending a haughty grin Clark's way. "You know, people keep telling me that, but I already have a client lined up, so perhaps my vision wasn't too outlandish."

"Oh?" Clark asked, raising a brow. "Do they already live here or…?"

Walter shook his head. "No, no, they're moving here and in fact, they want to move as soon as possible. Which is why I was a little… distracted when I bumped into you. I have to oversee a lot of the work to make sure it's up to the buyers standards." He waved his pile of paper to further his point.

Clark nodded. "They have high standards then?"

"Oh yes." Walter said with a smile. "Ms. Kyle is a wonderful woman, but she does expect a lot and I hope to deliver."

Clark nodded at that. "I'm sure she's very nice." He said. "But by the sounds of it I better let you get back to work. It was nice to meet you Walter."

"And you Clark. Oh, and here--" He pulled out a business card from his pocket and handed it over. "If you ever think about moving, here is my number. Be seeing you!" He said with a smile before

leaving, and despite what had happened only minutes prior, the man was back to reading his papers as he walked hurriedly down the street with nary a look in front of him.

As Clark made his way onto the docks he noticed a lot more movement than when he had first got there. There were quite a few large boats moored and a ramp was down on one of them, with vehicles being driven off and onto the road leading out into the main high street. The few islanders he passed held the same expression on their face that Clark was sure anyone would have upon seeing the amount of construction vehicles moving onto the island.

That was one thing he didn't miss about living in Metropolis. The noise. The loudest thing he had to deal with on his island was the mer screaming at him; no rumble of vehicles of clattering of construction.

He went home and upon unpacking his clothes and goods, he found the small blue box in and amongst them. He opened it, peering in at the silver chain dotted with small gemstones. He'd noticed Blue lounging under the jetty as he was returning, and sure enough as he went back outside, he was still there.

As he approached, the mer started to get up and swim the short distance back to shore. His eyes were half closed as though he had only recently awoke, and Clark had to assume it was his boat that was to thank for that. "Sorry for waking you." He said as he sat by the shore. His feet just touched the lapping water. At his words, Blue batted a hand his way, before shimmying along beside him.

Clark had hoped that he wouldn't notice the box right away, but of course upon seeing it in Clark's hands, he was curious. Blue leant over, his hand going for it, and screeching when Clark pulled it away. "Hey, hey. What have I told you about being patient?"

Blue frowned before huffing and turning to sit on his rear, arms crossed. He then sighed, then sighed again, and when Clark still hadn't moved he started to screech.

"Alright, *Jesus* ..." Clark muttered as he passed the box to him. "It's not edible." He said and tried not to roll his eyes as Blue's face grew disappointed,

That only lasted for a moment through as he lifted the lid and looked within. His eyes caught the gemstones, and he brought his hand up, trailing along the silver with his claw just as Clark had done. He looked up at Clark then, before pointing at himself. "Yeah." Clark said with a nod. "I got it for you."

As Blue watched him fervently, Clark grew embarrassed, and he could feel his face grow hot. “Okay, now that i'm thinking about it, this was a bad idea.” Clark reached for the box. “Never mind, you don’t need to--”

But Blue swiped at him, curling the box into his body, and hissing. Clark retreated and only when he brought his hands down did Blue bring the box back out and resume staring.

“Do you…” Clark began, swallowing. “You want me to put it on for you?”

Clark had assumed with the mers claws, it wasn’t going to be easy for him to try and handle the clasps himself. It did take a minute for the mer to respond to his question, perhaps still worried Clark would try and take it back if given the chance. Eventually though, he passed over the box, and Clark pulled out the chain, and brought it to his wrist. “It’s silver." Clark said uselessly, sure that the mer wouldn't have even cared if it had been plastic. “And the gems are aquamarines, they--" he cut himself off, and only once he had secured the clasp did he continue. “They reminded me of your eyes...”

As though trying to prove his point, Blue’s eyes blew wide and he looked at the gemstones again, moving his wrist from side to side and watching how the gemstones glittered in the sun.

He came forward then, pushing himself up and into Clark’s lap. He wrapped his arms around his neck, and once his face was right before his, brought his lips forward and brushed them against Clark’s.

Clark brought his hands up to the mers hips, holding him there gently. He parted his mouth and felt the mer's tongue dart forward. Heat enveloped his stomach, and threatened to move south at any moment, so he pulled back. Taking a deep breath. “You’re welcome.” He said after a moment.

The mer seemed reluctant to end the kiss, but with a petulant frown didn’t try to resume, opting instead to let go and roll onto the sand. He brought his wrist up and held it up above his face. He then started to chirp, using his other hand to point at the bracelet, then point at Clark.

Clark thought he understood him. “I brought it for you.”

But the mer shook his head, he repeated the gesture and this time made a face. A frown, then a smile.

Clark made a face right back. “I--” he tried to discern the meaning, and with great hesitance ventured. “I like it, yeah. That’s why I got it.”

The mer nodded, before sitting up. He then made his way into the water and Clark watched him go.

Clark wanted to ask where he was off to, but figured the mer wasn’t going to do anything stupid so let him go. He watched him swim until he noticed him delve deep into the water and after that Clark got up. He went inside and spent the rest of his evening relaxing as he waited for the mer to return home.

Chapter End Notes

Little longer for the update that usual, and for that I apologize. It most likely will be 2 weeks between updates from now on, which I know I have said before, but it's more to act as a warning rather than be definitive. May be sooner, may be longer. We will have to see how it goes.

Anyway with that out of the way, I hope you all enjoyed the chapter ;) Things are looking good between Blue and Clark. There are some new names and faces being introduced and a certain birthday is coming up ;D

As always I hope you enjoy <3 Your kind words and love are what keep me going, so, until I see you next, take care! :3

Chapter 20

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Later, as night approached, Clark found his earlier patience wearing thin.

It wasn't as if this was the first time the mer had been away from the island for the night. It was just that this was the first time in a very long while. Realistically, Clark expected Blue to venture away from the island more than he already did, and yet, as the hours ticked by and he still hadn't returned, Clark felt a cold sweat come over himself. *'He's fine,'* he'd tell himself. *'He can take care of himself,'* he'd begin to say when the first mantra lost its effectiveness.

But it was of little use; as the sun descended lower and lower, he finally bit the bullet, grabbed his keys and hopped onto his boat, heading for open water.

Trying to find the mer's heart beat in and amongst the noise of the ocean was harder than Clark expected. He must have been way deeper than usual, as any attempts to listen in were greeted with a painfully slow thud that Clark could have almost mistaken for the current. It did give him a general direction to aim towards though, and sure enough, as Clark made his way towards where the sound came from, he saw something in the water.

At first he thought it was Blue. At this distance, he could only see a tuft of dark hair and the vague shape of a body.

But as he pulled his boat up towards the thing in the water, he saw it wasn't in fact Blue, and that there wasn't just one of them floating there.

"Jesus christ…" Clark muttered as he brought his boat to a stop. He walked out onto the swim platform and stared out at the water.

Floating around in the waves were mers, unmoving, with their backs facing upwards towards the sky. There was not a single heartbeat from any of them. They were dead. All of them.

The sheer number of them had Clark's neck grow damp with sweat. There were at least ten of them from what he could see, and they weren't small either.

It might not have been the mer. He thought to himself. *Could have been anything* .

But even as he thought it, he knew that wasn't the case. It was just too much of a coincidence that the mer would be here, swimming underneath a group of now deceased mers. He'd seen what he was capable of, and despite thinking that this group would have been too much for even him to handle, Clark knew it wasn't. Given how Clark had found Blue when they'd first met, he had a feeling this sort of thing was normal for him.

Clark ended up waiting for the mer to reappear. He debated going back to the island now that he knew he was somewhat safe, but he also wanted to stay close by should more mers show and Blue needed to make a hasty retreat. Not that he would, mind you. Clark had a feeling short of dying, the mer wouldn't back down from a fight.

So he waited. And waited. And waited some more. It was soon midnight, and despite being here for a few hours now, the mer still hadn't shown up. Clark again debated going back to land and waiting for him there rather than in open water, surrounded by the dead, but he still didn't move, opting to remain where he was even as the sharks rolled in and started the process of getting rid of the bodies.

The other reason Clark remained was because he could finally hear Blue get closer. The beating was growing louder, faster, though only just. Really, he could have been kidding himself but somehow he knew that wasn't the case. Blue was swimming up towards him, he was just taking a monumentally long time to do it.

It wasn't long after that, that Clark could hear the familiar sound of Blue's heartbeat as he knew it. It was no longer changed by the depth, and when he looked into the water, he saw movement, a swishing tail, and not long after that, a face.

Blue poked his head out of the water, grinning.

Clark however wasn't smiling.

“Was this you?” He asked as he gestured out towards the bodies. The current as well as the sharks had displaced most of them, but some still remained close by, poking out from the water.

Blue raised a brow at the bodies, before turning back to Clark and shrugging.

He sighed. Despite knowing it had to have been Blue already, it was still slightly disappointing to have it confirmed. “You know what, I'm gonna assume they tried to attack you first and you were only acting in self defense.”

Blue’s ears twitched and a moment later he nodded.

“Alright.” Clark said, narrowing his eyes. “I mean, I don't believe you, but alright.”

The mer pouted up at him at the words, but as Clark’s face remained stoic, he quickly dropped the act with a roll of the eyes. He then lifted up what was in his hands, holding it out above the water.

Clark recoiled at it. “Good fucking God, what is that?”

It was a sack. A sack made from some sort of skin. It dripped with water, glistening and bulbous with whatever was inside. Clark wanted it thrown back down into the depths he had to assume Blue had found it. “Whatever that is, I don’t want it.”

But Blue wasn’t listening, he put the skin sack on the platform, and as Clark tried to continue his protests, he tipped it over, allowing its contents to spill out.

Clark expected guts and vitriol.

Maybe even some rotting whale meat.

What came out instead, was even more of a surprise.

“What--” his mouth fell open, and in a matter of moments his disgust had evaporated into the air, only to be replaced with pure shock. “What the Hell…” he muttered to himself as he stared down at the pile before him.

It was metal, huge coins of it, some mottled with a deep brown rust. Clark reached for a coin clear of rust, and when he lifted it up, he could see its yellow hue shining bright. As he examined the pile, he saw something else glittering in and amongst the coins.

He set down the coin he was holding, and slid his hand across the pile, pushing it over and revealing more of what was hidden. His finger touched a bluish gemstone and as he lifted it up, Blue pointed at it emphatically, before pointing at his wrist and showing off the bracelet there.

Clark’s eyes blew wide. He thought back to the mers earlier gestures; how he pointed at the bracelet and then at Clark. He let out a shaky laugh as he felt his heart flutter. “Is this a present for me?”

Blue chirped and nodded, going to the pile of gold and pushing it even further apart. There were more gems hidden, and after finding another piece of the blue stone, he held it up to Clark before setting on the ground. He did this a few more times, until there was a small pile of them by Clark’s foot, all glittering in the moonlight.

Clark’s mouth fell open. He intended to speak, to say anything, and yet as he stared at that small pile of gemstones he found himself incapable. His eyes misted over the longer he looked, and it was only as he closed them and took a deep breath that he could turn his stare towards the mer in the water. “Thank you.” He ended up saying. “This is so sweet. They’re beautiful.”

Blue sent him a smug smile and Clark rolled his eyes at the expression. “You’re a humble one, aren't you?” He let out, as he stood up. He made his way into the cabin and found the bucket he used for fishing inside one of the cupboards. He made his way back out and started to put the coins and gems into it. “I gotta ask though, where did you find all this?”

Blue’s head tilted to the side at the question, and after thinking about it, he simply smacked the wooden decking of the swim platform.

“A boat?” Clark ventured.

A single nod. Then, Blue brought his hands together and then blew them apart.

Bigger. “A ship?”

A nod.

Clark found himself nodding in return as he looked down at the coins. They were old, very old, with words written in a language Clark couldn’t even recognize. “Why did you bring me all this?” Clark asked. “The gems I get, but why the gold?” He asked as he lifted a coin up.

The mer frowned, and then as if to answer his question, he brought a finger up to his face and pointed it at his mouth.

Clark raised a brow. “...You *eat* these?”

Blue rolled his eyes and shook his head. He repeated the gesture again and this time pointed at Clark.

“Uh.” Clark made a face. “I don't eat these, either.”

Clark doesn’t remember seeing the mer look so frustrated, but there he was, hitting his head against the swim platform with a growl. He gave up trying to communicate apparently, opting to slide back into the water with a grumble.

“No, no.” Clark muttered as he watched the mers melodramatics. He went to the edge and reached into the water to tap at the mers head before he descended even further. He soon came back to the surface, glaring up at Clark. “I’m sorry, okay? I'm trying to understand. So let’s just try it again.”

Blue rolled his eyes and dove into the water. Clark’s mouth fell open to protest but after a quick burst of movement, he was back up, now holding a small fish in his hands. Clark stared at it. “Okay,” he said, his eyes trained on the writing animal. “Now what?”

Blue held out his hand, and eyed the coin still in Clark's hand. At the attention, Clark held it up. "You want this?" He asked.

The mer nodded.

Clark handed it over, and after it landed in his palm, Blue dumped the fish on Clark's lap.

As the thing flopped around, Clark jolted backwards, swiping at the thing. It fell onto the platform, and with a few more wriggles it was back in the water with a plop. Clark let out a sharp breath as he watched it swim away.

The mer didn't look impressed.

Clark sent him a sheepish smile. "Sorry." He muttered and at that, the mer only rolled his eyes, holding the coin up to him. Clark spent a moment looking at the doubloon, and as he did he frowned. A coin. Handing it over. Giving him the fish. "Wait." He muttered. "Are you saying you brought me gold, so I can *spend* it?"

After a few ear twitches, Blue's face lit up and he nodded vigorously. Gesturing between the bucket and Clark, and then at himself.

"You brought me gold... So I can buy *you* things?"

Blue grinned.

"What would you even want, huh?" Clark asked, smiling. "More jewelry?"

Blue shook his head, and once again pointed at his mouth.

"You..." Clark felt a laugh bubbled up inside. "You want me to buy you *food*?"

Blue’s grin only grew.

The laughter threatening to come out, finally did and Clark fell back onto the platform as it racked through his body.

His stomach hurt when he finally sat back up, and Blue’s expression was back to being unimpressed. Clark however was still smiling. “I’m sorry, this is just so--” he cut himself off as another laugh threatened to come out. “You gotta admit, this is hilarious.”

Despite his expression, Clark carried on, his smile still there if a little muted. “This is sweet of you, but that stuff I showed you yesterday can also be used to feed you. That was money, too. So whilst this is nice, I don’t really need it.”

Blue took in the words, and then made that same growl of frustration. Clark tried to prevent it from getting louder. “Hey, hey.” Clark said softly, and Blue’s growl stopped. “I'm not saying I don't appreciate it, I guess I just…” but Clark made a face at his own words and shook his head. “No, that really does sound like I don’t appreciate it, doesn't it?”

At that, Blue raised a brow and gave a single slow nod. Clark smiled. “I’m sorry for laughing. This was really sweet of you, but I mean it, I don't even know what i’d spend all this on. You don't exactly eat so much that I'd require literal pirate gold to feed you.” But as Clark said the words, his mind was suddenly elsewhere. He thought beyond food and realised the list of possibilities this money afforded him was larger than he realised.

He had been living below his means since moving to the island. Not because he enjoyed sleeping in a cramped cot or shitting in a poorly ventilated outhouse, but because using the money he did have meant having to acknowledge how he’d acquired that money in the first place, and thinking about his job and life before the quake often brought with it a whole host of bad thoughts he’d rather not deal with. At times, it was better to pretend that part of his life never even happened.

But as earlier today had proved, he was getting better at delving into his past without dealing with the subsequent breakdown it created. For one, he was looking forward to trying on his new clothes tomorrow, and as he stared at the pile of gold coins beside him, he wondered if there were more things he could buy that would give him that same feeling of excitement over what the future would bring. A bigger tub for Blue to sleep in. A bigger bed for himself. Maybe that was what the mer was getting at when he pointed at himself. Food was part of it, sure, but maybe he had bigger ideas in mind than Clark was giving him credit for.

And the more he thought about it, the more the idea took shape. He could build a whole new home for himself, or better yet, pay someone to do it for him. Whilst he did still have his savings, he knew realistically it would only allow himself to extend how he already lived and wasn't going to give him the opportunity to change it.

With this however, he might be able to.

"Alright." Clark said, with a slow nod. "You win. With all this, I'm gonna buy you the biggest fattest steak I can find and see what else I can do about fancying up the island."

Blue smiled brightly, his tongue darting across his lip as he pushed himself up onto the platform, darting forward towards Clark and kissing him brusquely. Clark brought his hand up and curled it around his neck holding him there for a moment before pulling back. The mer smiled once more before wiggling fully out of the water, across the platform and lounging there.

Clark debated going back to land now that the mer was aboard, but as he now had a reason to venture out to a larger city the next day, it seemed like a waste of time to go all the way back home only to head out once more come morning. It was a risk sleeping out in open water, but he'd done it before and as of yet, hasn't had to deal with any mers trying to tip him. "I'm gonna go to bed, you gonna sleep out here?"

As he asked the question, he already knew what the mers response was going to be. Blue nodded his head and remained where he was. Clark understood. Given the mer activity around these parts, even with a few now dead in the water, Clark could tell Blue wasn't going to leave the area especially whilst Clark was asleep.

It reminded him of the last time Blue had stayed here with him. Watching over him as he slept. At any moment he, or any mer could have dragged him in, and yet he awoke that morning safe and untouched.

He turned away then, intent on going to his bedroom, but upon seeing Blue lying uncomfortably along the wooden planks, Clark pursed his lips.

He went into his cabin, and pulled the mattress off the frame. He brought the sheets and blankets along with him, and dragged them all out onto the platform. Blue raised a brow at him, but Clark simply shrugged a shoulder. "Can't leave you alone out here, can I?"

Blue sat up at that, chirping as he wiggled to the side to allow Clark to set down the mattress. It was still a single, but he hoped it being on the floor would mean it wouldn't feel like he was going to fall off the edge as easily given the two grown bodies that would be trying to sleep in it.

After getting the sheets and bedding situated, the mer made his way onto the mattress and Clark came in behind him. With the mers still damp hair by his face, Clark brought his arm around him, and tried to sleep.

As he laid there though, he wondered what he had been thinking only a few minutes prior.

In the moment, the idea seemed fine, sweet even, but with the mer now curled up against him, and the gentle rocking of the boat causing their bodies to move against one another, Clark found himself cursing his own idiocy.

For the most part he was able to ignore his burgeoning erection with nothing more than will power. He forced his mind away from the situation and when that started to wain, he pulled his crotch back slightly, even though it meant his body was half hanging off the edge of the mattress. He found he didn't care though, as the alternative was still too much for him to deal with in the present moment.

In between the haze of trying to keep certain areas of himself at bay and sleep, morning came. He saw the sun slowly rise across the water, and when he sat up right and rubbed the sleep from his eyes he saw Blue still there next to him, asleep.

Clark left him for now and went inside. He fixed himself up some breakfast and by the time he was walking back out, Blue had sat up, squinting up at Clark as he chirped. Clark fought back a smile as he stared at the mers hair, sticking out in every direction. "How'd you sleep?" Clark asked sweetly as he bit into a slice of toast.

The mer growled and fell back into the bed, pulling the sheet over his head. Clark looked out of the water at the sun still rising. "Yeah, I don't think that sheet's gonna block out the sun very well." He said as he crouched down beside the mer. "Come on, it's morning anyway. Time to get up."

Another growl, but this one was higher, in fact Clark would have even classified it as a whine. He laughed. "Come on now, I gotta get going. I'm heading to Sacramento today."

That at least caused the mer to pull the bedding down as he now glared up at Clark. Clark took another bite of toast. “Well, I gotta get a birthday present for Marcos for one, and i'm also gonna see if I can get the gold you brought me appraised.”

He didn’t know Sacramento all that well, but if it was anything like Metropolis had been, it was going to have an industry dedicated to appraising this sort of thing. Wrecks were all too common after all, whether it be something as small as a fishing boat or something as large as a passenger liner. Throughout history there have been cases of boats sinking and being lost to the waves, and Clark had to assume the doubloons he now had were from one such ship; lost in a time that no one currently alive on the planet had ever known.

In the past, these things were thought totally lost, with the mers making it all but impossible to venture deep into the waters and find them, but as humans have grown more advanced, so too have their technologies.

Submersibles and remotely operated vehicles allow for some to explore the seas. Most still see it as a needlessly risky venture, as even travelling across the surface of the ocean is too dangerous in some areas. And yet, there are still people who use these means to try and cash in on the things that most assumed would be gone forever; the sort of people who would dive into the water and push past the skeletons and destroyed cargo to find anything of value.

Those people, in Clark’s mind, were morons.

Fishing is one thing. Shipping is another. But people who voluntarily go down into the water just to try and get some easy money were not the kind of people Clark expected to survive long.

And yet, the people who did it, still continue to do so. From what Clark knew about the folks who had made a living from it in Metropolis; they were nothing short of the luckiest folks around, going into the water and retrieving anything from priceless artifacts to sunken treasures as though they weren't venturing into a literal death trap every time.

Perhaps it was just luck, or maybe there were others factors involved that Clark didn't know. What he did know though, was that just like most cases, greed was one hell of a motivator here. Whilst he, as well as the better part of society, might try to convince people not salvage wrecks, there will always be folks who will; the potential pay day being too much for some to ignore.

And the great irony was that Clark was technically going to be one of them.

Well, not entirely, he thought as he looked at the mers still sleepy face. *The mer did all the heavy lifting.*

“Alright now,” he said, pulling the blanket from him entirely. “Swim back home.”

When the mer didn’t budge, Clark crouched down with a sigh. “Come on now, don’t make me throw you in.”

The mer grumbled, and at a glacial speed slowly made his way into the water, before falling into it with a splash. He came back up and resumed his earlier glaring at Clark. “Don’t gimme that, it's dangerous near Sacramento, too. Just wait for me back at the island, okay?”

He could tell the mer didn’t want to, so Clark came forward and placed a single kiss on his forehead. “Don’t pout.” He muttered, giving another kiss. “I'll buy you a steak while I’m there, so just go on home, and I’ll be back before you know it.”

That had the intended effect as the mer now nodded, his face less forlorn than it had been moments ago. He chirped and then dove into the waves, swimming back towards where Clark’s island laid, leaving Clark free to continue onward to Sacramento.

It was less busy than it had been on his previous visit. There were still a whole host of boats littering the docks, but Clark found the noise of it all less overwhelming, in fact, the more he walked the more he found that was the case.

Even the people milling around the streets didn’t phase him as much, and as cars breezed by only to be halted by the city's traffic, he found his palms only growing slightly damp. It was still there, the ever present anxiety, but it had lessened considerably, and it allowed him to take the city in properly as he walked through it.

And it was on his walk, bucket in hand, that he found where he was looking for. A salvage shop. There were a few of them there, side by side, but as Clark peeked into the three of them, it was the one in the middle that ended up drawing him in.

As he stepped inside, he took in the room. There were several men around the place, one was at the front counter, and two were sitting at desks. The last stood and noted things on a clipboard. The place had the smell of salt water, as well as what Clark was learning to recognize as rusted metal. The most notable thing Clark noticed however, was the men's attire.

It appeared to be a uniform, but it was somewhat unusual one given the time of year; all the men wore turtlenecks, black in colour. Even with the air conditioning, Clark wondered how they could wear something so stifling.

In fact the place was so warm, Clark found himself swiping a bead of sweat from his forehead as he ventured further inside. The man at the front desk looked up at him, before sending him an easy smile. “Ahoy hoy.” He said as he set his newspaper down. “What can the Darton family do for you today?”

“Uh, yeah.” Clark said as he placed the bucket on the table. “I was doing some salvaging and--”

“Were you now?” The man said as he sent a small smile upwards to Clark. Something in his gaze made him look away and the man rose up from his seat. He peered into the bucket and whistled. “Well, fuck me, you had a good dive.” He muttered, and as his eyes slid back onto Clark, they traveled up along his neck.

“Yeah.” Clark said, pursing his lips. “Very good.”

The man's gaze lingered on him a while longer, and without a word, the men with a clipboard came behind the counter, reaching into the bucket and picking up a coin. “Wow.” He let out, before setting his clipboard down and readjusting his glasses. “You mind if I take a closer look at these?”

“Sure.” Clark said, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

The man picked up hand full of the buckets contents, and went to the backroom. After a few minutes he came back out and placed them on the counter. “You’ve got a nice mix here. Most of them are gold; these ones here--” he gestured to the ones completely clear of rust. “Gold doesn’t rust in the water, but that isn’t to say these ones aren’t valuable.” He said as he pointed to the dull coins mottled with rust. “These are silver.”

“They are?” Clark asked, looking at the near black metal.

“Yeah, silver rusts pretty badly in salt water, but it's nothing a little cleaning won’t fix.”

Silver rusts in salt water. Clark found himself grimacing as he came to grips with the fact that he, only yesterday, brought a *mer* a silver bracelet. “Uh huh.” He said more to himself.

“But like I said, we can clean and process all of the metal you have here in fact. Even the aquamarines.”

Clark shook his head. “The stones I'll keep, but the metal, how much are you thinking it's all worth?”

“Well,” the man learned back, his face growing thoughtful. “If this bucket is full of authentic doubloons, and they’re all the same quality of the ones I tested, given the price of gold and silver at the moment i’d say…” he trailed off, his eyes squinting in concentration. “Between five hundred thousand to a million.”

Clark couldn’t help it, his mouth fell open. “Huh?”

“It's a big ball park figure as I don't know how much gold versus silver is in there. I'm also just going by how much it looks like it weighs. I’d need to weigh it all and find out the concentrations but yeah, I'd say somewhere in that region.”

“Yeah yeah…” Clark said, waving his hand. “But you’re saying this shit could be worth a *million* dollars.”

“Potentially.” He said with a nod. “Though I must add that if we were to appraise and process it for you, we’d take a cut of the profits as our handling fee. It would still leave you with a sizable amount, though.”

“How much is that?”

“Twenty five present, which I know is a little high compared to our competition, but we are the most experienced in the city, have the best contacts, and hey, best case scenario you'd still be walking away with three quarters of a million.”

Clark wasn’t exactly in the mood to try and shop around for a better deal, so he simply nodded. “Works for me.”

“Perfect.” The man said, and without another word, the man at the counter stood up and took the bucket. “We’ll weigh it all and see the quality we’re dealing with. It will most likely take us a an hour, but once we know the amounts we’re dealing with, we’ll write up a contract for you. Once it's signed, it will take another month or so for us to process the coins, but when all is said and done, we'll wire transfer you your share. Easy as that.”

Clark frowned. “Uh, what if I don't have access to my bank account?”

The two men shared a look. Even the men behind him now turned towards him. Though they were all silent, Clark could almost feel the conversation going on between them. “I'd try and get access, or, set one up a new one.” The man with glasses said, tilting his head. “Considering the amount we’re dealing with here, I’m sure you can imagine giving you cash for it all would be difficult. There is a bank along Angrave road that we usually do business with. I’d try there.”

“Right.” Clark said with a nod. “I'll be back in a few hours then. It was a pleasure--” he held out his hand.

“Jake.” The man with glasses said. “This is my brother Sid.” He gestured to the man next to him. “And the two behind you are our other brothers, Mickey and Gus.” When Clark turned he saw the two in question facing him. They both waved.

“Right.” Clark nodded. “All brothers, huh? This really is a family business.” He said to which all the men nodded. Clark gestured at himself. “I’m Clark.”

“Well, Clark,” Jake said before picking up his clipboard. “As I said, come back in a little while and we’ll have everything ready waiting for you.”

“Yeah…” he said as he went to leave. “I better go to the bank, huh?”

“That probably would be best.” Jake said with a smile.

So that was what Clark did. He ventured down Angrave road as he was told and as he looked up at the signage he knew it looked familiar. It was his old bank. Well, not the one he used to frequent, but it was the same branch.

As he stepped inside though, he could almost convince himself it was his old bank. It had the same furniture, the same carpeting, hell, even the smell was familiar and upon that revelation he had to sit down in one of the chairs lest he get even more lightheaded.

In the end it, the whole process wasn’t as difficult as Clark thought it would be. With his ID, and a bit of time the teller was able to gain access to his account, as well as order a new bank card for Clark as he still didn’t actually know where his old one was. He’d need to pick it up in a few days time, but other than that, his account was back in action.

He also made sure to let the teller know that he was expecting a large some of money to come in soon, and after throwing the name Darton out there, she seemed to understand. She offered to help take any funds out whilst he was there, and after finding out that the interest on his savings had been better than he anticipated, he took her up on that.

Most people probably wouldn’t stuff wads of notes into the pockets of their khakis in broad daylight, but Clark was not most people, and he wasn’t exactly worried about muggers.

In fact, it was as he left the bank, brazenly counting his money, that he noticed a man walk up to him. Despite the knife hidden in his palm, Clark simply walked past him, using his super speed to throw the blade onto the street. He kept walking, fighting back laughter as he noted the man's apparent confusion.

It was as he was heading back to the shop, that he stopped himself. It hadn’t even been an hour yet, so he had time to kill. He took to window shopping. Furniture as well as a few home improvement stores caught his eyes, and yet, he didn’t stop in any of the ones he saw. He needed to have a better home before he could consider improving it, so he kept walking until he saw a different store and the other reason for his visit came to mind.

Video game boxes, as well as DVD's lined the walls of the store. There were a few glass cabinets holding sleek looking consoles of varying shapes and sizes. Clark was lost just looking at them all, so

he approached the register and eyed the meek looking teenager manning it. “I'm gonna be honest, I don't know about any of this stuff. I just need a good present for a twenty year old who likes video games.”

“Yeah?” The teen asked, before clearing his throat. “How much do you want to spend?”

Clark thought of the money in his pocket. “A lot.”

Which was how Clark ended up leaving the place with a brand new handheld console as well as several games for it. The sales assistant said it was the newest one around and the games all sounded like they should be fun. He figured Marcos wasn’t going to already own it given its relatively recent release, but he couldn’t exactly verify that without spoiling the surprise.

So he just had to hope, and it was with that same sense of hope that he walked back into the Darton shop and found Jake behind the counter. The rest, Clark noticed, were in the back room, and upon entering, Jake looked up at him with a grin. “Ah, Clark. Good to see you.”

“Am I on time?”

“You are indeed.” Jake said as set his board down and slid it towards Clark. “We’ve weighed it all and have a good idea as to its concentration. Turns out, the coins are mostly gold and we even have a few of them dated and know a few collectors who’d pay a premium for them, so the amounts I quoted were actually on the low side.”

Clark huffed a small laugh. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope. It's gonna be closer to one point five mil gross, and even after our service cut, you’re looking at over a million.”

“That’s--” Clark couldn’t believe it. In fact, he was expecting to hear the word ‘sike’ at any moment.

“It’s a Hell of a find, I would ask where you were diving but I can't imagine you’d be eager to share the location.” Jake smirked.

“Haha, yeah…” Clark said as he rubbed the back of his neck. It wasn’t as if Clark could even divulge where exactly it had come from. He just knew it was deep.

“Anyway, you just need to sign here and fill in your details and we will be able to transfer you the money as and when it comes in. Finding buyers and shipping it around can take time so we usually say it will takes at least a month for all funds to go through. We also state in the contact that the amount I quote can be off, depending on what buyers actually pay for it, but you should still get something close to the quoted amount.”

After filling in his details and signing, Clark received a copy for his own records. He folded the paper and slipped it into his shirt pocket before saying his goodbyes. He then picked up his bucket, now only filled with a handful of gemstones.

As he went to leave, Jake sent him a nod. “Thank you for your business.” He let out, but at the words, his mouth didn’t close. He instead sent a furtive glance to the side room that housed his brothers, before whispering to Clark with a smile. “Be sure to thank your assistant when you get home.”

Clark paused at that. “My assistant?”

Jake only smiled. “Come on now, we’re not dumb. You had help, right?”

Clark's frown only grew, as did the redness in his cheeks. *Could he mean..?*

Jake must have noticed something was wrong as he quickly shook his head. “Never mind, forget I said anything. Have a good day, Clark.”

Clark wanted to drop it, but the question stuck with him, even as he made his way back to the dock. *You had help, right?* It didn’t sound like an accusation, simply an observation, an accurate one, Clark might add. And yet, hearing it had Clark's heart pounding. After what had happened only a few days prior, he felt the need to try and keep Blue even more of a secret. He couldn’t trust anyone with what he knew, and even acknowledging the mers presence in his life with someone Clark didn’t trust implicitly felt like a step too far.

So with that, he simply tucked away the conversation into the part of his brain he rarely ventured into.

Once back on the boat he was able to take the aquamarines out of the bucket and look them over more thoroughly. They were in rough chunks, unlike the ones on the bracelet he'd brought. But these were beautiful in their own right, perhaps even more so for the way the harsh edges caught the light. He set one down on the console of his boat, intending to place the others around his home when he returned.

That thought only made him realise how few places he actually had to decorate.

All the more incentive to change that, he thought.

Upon arriving home he stepped off the boat and found Blue under the jetty. Clark crouched down by the edge and lent over. "I'm back." He yelled somewhat redundantly, considering the mer's eyes were already cracked open in his direction.

The mer called out to him, and in the water Clark could hear the somewhat musical quality of it, though that stopped the moment he poked his head out and it transformed into its usual hellish screech. Clark winced. "Sorry. Did I wake you again?"

A single nod was the answer, but other than that, Blue only held up his arms to Clark who in turn rolled his eyes. "Alright, your majesty." Clark said as he brought his arms around the mer and lifted him up and over his shoulder. It might have been caused by the undignified position or the burst movement, but the mer let out a loud squawk as Clark picked him up and moved him into the cabin.

Once settled in his tub, Clark went back to the boat and picked up the bucket as well as his shopping bag. Upon his return, he took to decorating; setting a gemstone down on his desk, and then another on the window sill. He looked around his home with the last stone in his hand and with pressed lips placed it on the desk next to the other before sending a nod to Blue. "I'll figure out where to put it later." He said.

Blue chirped in a way that told Clark that he agreed with the sentiment. He then pointed at the empty bucket and then at Clark. Who only nodded. "Yeah, I got the metal evaluated." Clark sent him a smile. "I had no idea you were so rich."

Blue grinned at that, pointing to himself then at his bracelet and chirping. He kept repeating the gestures and Clark sat down with a small laugh. "Once it's been processed and I've got the money, I was thinking…" he trailed off and tented his hands. "I was thinking of doing the island up, maybe get

you a bigger pool to sleep in and stuff." He looked at the metal tub and pursed his lips. "Get a bathroom, a real kitchen…" Clark smiled. "It would be nice."

More nods, but this time instead of chirping Blue only pointed at his mouth. Clark laughed again. "Yeah yeah, i'd get you food too, i'd--"

But he cut himself off. "Fuck." He muttered before sending Blue a sheepish grin. "Uh… I may have forgotten to get you some steak while I was out."

All at once Blue's face dropped and he brought his hands down into the water in dismay. He frowned and began screeching. Clark only held up his hands in submission. "I'm sorry, okay? I got distracted, I was buying a birthday present for Marcos and--"

The screeching only grew louder and rather than remain sitting there, Blue pushed himself out from the tub towards Clark, colliding against him with such force that Clark's chair tipped back and they both smacked against the floor. The wind was knocked out of him in an instant, and as he looked up, Blue was there baring his teeth above him. As he did, Clark couldn't help but think that this would be the last thing that most creatures that went up against Blue would see. An apex predator poised to strike, bearing down on their victim with unrestricted power.

And yet, Clark wasn't exactly feeling 'fear' in that moment.

As he looked up at Blue, he felt his heart pounding. *Please don't tell me this is waking something in me.* He thought to himself as his half hard cock was brought to his attention. Blue was still growling, his claws curling into Clark's shirt and ripping it slightly.

Yeah, no, this definitely awoke something. Fuck. He pursed his lips and tried to move but found that Blue was even more of an immovable lump when he so chose to be. He bared down on Clark, and despite his best efforts, ground down against his cock.

Clark moaned, and at the sound, Blue's ears began to twitch. In an instant, his growling stopped and was replaced with a curious chirp that had Clark growing red. "Uh, that was nothing, just--"

Blue repeated the movement, and the jolt that ran through Clark's body felt like lighting; setting off every nerve in his body and leaving him reeling. Clark's head fell backwards, and he brought his hand

to his face to try and mask the redness. “Stop that!”

But Blue expression changed once more, the curious look slowly disappeared and a slow grin replaced it. He wiggled again and Clark bit down onto his hand to try and stop himself from making any more sounds, but if anything Blue took that as a challenge and came in close, bringing his lips up to Clark’s ear and licking it.

“Oh *fuck.* ” Clark let out. This was too much. Actually, half a minute ago it was too much. Now it was so much that Clark couldn’t actually see anything other than the overwhelming muchness that was swallowing him. He steeled himself and brought his hands up to Blue and pushed him away, slipping out from underneath him and clambering up right.

Blue looked up at him from the floor, a bored stare his only response as he reclined against the wood. “You really are a little gremlin.” Clark muttered as he tried and failed to flatten the front of his pants. His erection was even more obvious now, but he simply turned away from the mer and stormed outside.

He wasn’t mad per say, he wasn’t even annoyed, if anything he was mind meltingly aroused, wondering just what the fuck he was doing by walking away from an opportunity to rectify that.

But something was stopping him; that fear of the unknown. Despite seeing with his own eyes evidence to the contrary; the idea that all of this was nothing more than a ruse came back to him, and it had Clark’s heart aching. *I thought you said you were fine using him.* His mind supplied as he made his way towards his boat. *If he’s just toying with you, what guilt should you have over taking advantage of that?*

What if he isn’t though. Another part of him said as Clark stepped onto the boat. He brought his hands to his face, trying to even his breathing. *What if all of this is genuine?*

He actually didn’t know what was worse. The idea that the mer really was toying with him, or if he really felt the same way Clark did. Both offered with them their own respective can of worms, and in that moment, it seemed that the can Clark would be opening had everything to do with how close he was to his breaking point.

Just don’t think about it . He settled on. *If you don’t think about it, you can’t get overwhelmed. Simple.*

~~*Right, because that has worked for you so well in the past.*~~

“God damnit…” he muttered to himself as he slid down the door of the boat. Why he came here he still didn’t know, perhaps he simply wanted distance, and yet, a part of himself far less jaded than the rest had the real answer. He made his way to the console, and slipped his keys into the ignition.

He returned home a few hours later, half expecting the mer to be back under the jetty, but he wasn't. He was back in the tub when Clark stepped inside. The chair was still tipped over, and a few things from his desk were on the floor, but Clark righted them both quickly and then set his shopping bag down on the counter. “Hey.” He said.

Blue cracked an eye open, but then shut it again.

Clark could understand the mers lack luster response, so he let out a sigh. “Oh well, if you’re asleep, guess i’ll be eating all this meat by myself.”

Blue’s eyes burst open.

“Yeah, I thought that would work.” Clark smirked as he pulled the packets out meat he had out of the bag. “I went to Manton. Their selection was pretty limited, but I did get you a steak, and me some chicken.”

The mer didn’t seem to be listening as he clambered out of the tub towards Clark’s legs. He pulled at the edge of his pants and pointed to the packets. Clark only smiled. “Patience, Blue. I still gotta cook it.”

Which is what he did. He set the pan on the flame and cooked the steak a minute a side. Once done, he passed it straight from the pan Blue’s way and the moment it was in his hands it was being ripped apart by his jagged teeth. Clark grimaced at the sounds of flesh being ripped and chewed so turned his attention back to cooking. He had barely put his chicken in the pan before Blue was tugging at his pant leg once more, looking up at him with wide eyes. Clark balked. “You're kidding right? I just gave it to you!”

Blue pointed at his mouth.

Clark sighed. “I told you. I don't have any more. I only went to Manton, and they didn’t have much beef today.” Clark looked at the pan where his chicken was sizzling away. “I only have chicken left, but I know you don't--”

But Blue was ignoring him, reaching up onto the counter and taking one of the packets that was there.

“Whoa whoa.” Clark snatched it from him. “This is raw, you gremlin. You remember last time, don’t you?" At Blue's blank expression, Clark rolled his eyes. "Well *I* do. And I for one don't want a repeat of it.”

Blue glared at him, and then pointed at the packet and nodded his head. Clark rolled his eyes. “Nice try, but I told you--”

In the moments Clark was speaking, Blue reached for the pan, grabbing the handle and bringing it down to the floor. He was smart enough to not touch the metal at least, but still scooped the half cooked chicken up and brought it to his lips. Clark all but yelped. “No, you--” he crouched down and snatched the chicken from Blue’s mouth, though not before he could bite down on it. Clark let out a strained sigh. “I told you! This is raw! You’re gonna get sick again.”

But Blue only shook his head, reaching for the chicken despite Clark moving his hand further away.

His persistence, whether it was misplaced or not, caused Clark to concede and with a reluctant frown he handed the wad of meat back to Blue who resumed his munching. Clark brought the pan back to the flame and remained quiet as he unpacked the other chicken breast and cooked it. As he did so, he watched Blue in his periphery and tried to not let images of the last time Blue ate chicken flood his mind.

And yet, even after eating it, and even as they went to sleep; the emetophobic nightmare Clark was expecting never occurred. Even as the morning came, the mer seemed fine and as the day went on, that was still the case.

Clark wondered how that was possible, but in the end he chose not to look a gift horse in the mouth. Maybe the mer’s stomach was stronger than he thought. Maybe last time was a fluke. Maybe it was nothing more than bad timing. Who really knew.

What Clark did know though, was that the mer was full of surprises and in a weird way he was looking forward to learning more of them.

Chapter End Notes

Every time I start a chapter I'm like 'oh God, I have nothing, I've written like 500 words, this is so bad' and then like, a few hour goes by and i'm like 'how the fuck did 8000 words show up.'

Anyway, I hope you all liked this chapter! Clark is wealthier, Blue is still a gremlin, and more mysteries and curiosities come to light ;) I also had fun writing more Blue and Clark antics. They are such disasters <3 (Also lets be real, Clark being into Blue's primal side is a given and will defo be something I will be exploring ;))

As always, let me know your thoughts and I hope you all liked this chapter! Until next time :D

Chapter 21

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Waiting. That was how Clark spent the next few days; he lay in wait, expecting at any moment for Blue to fall ill. He waited, and waited, and waited some more, but even as the day came to an end and they both awoke the next morning, the mer remained as he had been; perfectly fine.

Despite knowing he should be thankful for that small mercy, Clark, as with most things in his life, was preparing for it to all go to Hell at a moment's notice and as such, wasn't about to rest on his laurels just because the mer *looked* fine.

But slowly, as more of those long August days came and went, that fear left his mind altogether.

Which was why he was particularly blindsided upon waking this morning.

Of course the moment all thoughts of illness had left his mind, he'd wake to find that Blue was nor longer 'perfectly fine'. He had been grumbling the day before, but Clark had simply chalked it up to his usual grumpiness and moved on with his day. Now it seemed as though that grumbling had a far deeper meaning and it was only now causing Clark to grow concerned. He jumped off his bed and crouched beside the mer, his hand gingerly reaching for him. "Hey… You okay?"

The mer's hand was over his stomach, and after giving a few curt shakes of the head, Clark's frown only grew. "What do you need?" He asked. "You wanna stay in here or go in the water?"

There was no response for a while, and Clark wondered if perhaps Blue was using his energy to prevent another vomit spectacle from occurring rather than to try and answer his question. So he'd waited there beside him, and only when the mer looked at the door and shook his head did Clark speak. "Okay, we'll stay inside. You wanna lay on the bed or stay in the tub?"

This time, he glanced at the bed and nodded. Clark moved his arms to either side of the mer, and gently lifted him from the water before laying him along the mattress. Now that he was there, the strain on the mer's face seemed to dissipate, but his lips still remained curled into a tight frown. Clark brought his own hand to his stomach, just underneath where the mer's own lay. It looked bloated, and

felt warm to the touch, but as Clark wasn't any closer to understanding mer biology-- despite now being in a relationship with one-- he didn't know what that even meant. He had to assume it was bad if Blue's reaction was anything to go by, but whether it was 'leave it alone and it will sort itself out bad' or 'leave it alone and it will only get worse bad' was still up for debate.

Obviously, he wished it was the former. That had been the case last time after all, and upon that thought he tried to remember more from those days where the mer was sick. He was so sure it had been the chicken, but as he trailed through his memory that idea became somewhat murky. He'd been bitten that morning, and whilst Clark was patching him up, he assumed the grumbles and winces were wholly from the bite, but the longer he thought about it, the less sure he became. He had seemed off that whole day, in fact upon refelction, it was strange for him to have even gotten bitten in the first place given how capable he was of avoiding them usually. It was only now, as Clark was seeing a strange repetition of it all, that he thought something else must have been afoot here.

For one, Clark had been surprised the chicken had affected him so much in the first place. Clark thought of the whale; which was now unrecognizable given how much of the meat was now gone, and knew for a fact the mer still nibbled at it, yet under cooked chicken was too much for his stomach? It didn't sit right with Clark at the time, and today was no different.

He moved his hand gently from side to side across the warm skin, and the mer seemed to appreciate it; giving an appreciative purr with each press of Clark's hand. He kept it moving, and with the other tugged the metal tub closer to the bed, should the mer need it for one reason or another. When he turned back to Blue, he saw those eyes on him. "You need anything?" He asked.

The mer shook his head, and only brought his hand up to gingerly take hold of Clark's as it moved. "You want me to stop?" He asked. Blue shook his head, vigorously this time.

"Okay..." Clark said softly, continuing the movement. "You know why you're not feeling good? You eat something you weren't meant to, or..?" He trailed off at the question. That was still what his mind dwelled on. Food. The mer seemed indestructible, and Clark couldn't fathom something as mundane as a stomach bug or the flu being the cause of the mer's anguish. It had to be something else, but what that could be still eluded him. For better or for worse, he wondered what someone who actually knew a thing or two about mers would say in his place.

'Then let me examine him! If you say this black fin is an anomaly, let me see for myself. You needn't give him to me, but I will pay you whatever amount you desire simply for the opportunity to look at him.'

Clark frowned at the memory. Despite how much he wanted to ignore the idea of ever taking Blue to Elijah voluntarily, he couldn't deny that the mer's condition was something that worried him. Last time he had been left emaciated by his illness, and Clark didn't want to imagine it happening once more.

It was why he had been so worried about the chicken, why he watched the mer so intently over those next few days. If he were to get sick, Clark hoped that this time, he'd be better prepared to deal with it, maybe even stop the worst of it before it left Blue thin and helpless once more.

That was something at least, Clark thought. He wasn't vomiting this time around, so Clark held onto that. Maybe he still could prevent a repeat of last time. "Come on, B, talk to me. You eat something bad? Yes or no."

Blue's head tilted to the side, but when he opened his mouth all that came out was a single long groan that grew higher and higher until it ended with a strained sigh. Clark winced right along with him. "Alright, I get it. Not the best time to ask."

That caused a sharp nod, followed by a series of equally sharp exhales. As he watched him, Clark resumed his thoughts. Whatever was wrong here appeared to be more painful than anything. Of course the lack of vomiting was part of it, but it was also the way Clark could see Blue's stomach tensing as he lay there, as though the muscles themselves were in spasm. *Muscle strain?* He thought to himself. It seemed plausible given how much the mer swam. If that were the case, Clark tried to think of something that might help-- something other than seaweed.

'Damn cramps... Clark, can you grab me the hot water bottle?'

Right, he thought to himself. Lois often used a hot water bottle whenever, as she put, her uterus was trying to kill her. Whilst he knew the mer didn't have one, he felt the principle was the same in regards to other types of aches.

So he had a solution, not a concrete one and not one that he could confidently say would actually help, but a solution nonetheless. The only problem was he didn't have a hot water bottle here. Didn't have any pain medication, either. Really, the more time he and the mer spent together the more he realised how lacking his home truly was.

He only saw one option and with pursed lips he said, "I'm gonna go to Cottonwood real quick. Grab you some stuff that might help."

He knew the mer wasn’t a fan of the idea if his frown was anything to go by, but considering he wasn’t even able to make a single noise of derision bar a low grumble, Clark figured he was just going to have to deal with it. “Before I go, do you need me to grab you anything? Water? Seaweed?”

Blue tried to speak, but eventually he just brought his hand to his head and tapped it. Clark made a face. “You have a headache, too?” He ventured.

He shook his head, and tapped the center of his forehead once more, his whines growing all the more pathetic. Clark looked at the area for a little while longer and a curious thought entered his mind. *Does he mean…?* He asked himself, and with a great deal of hesitation, he lent forward and pressed his lips there.

Blue finally made a noise that didn’t sound as though pain was its sole and only contributor and that caused Clark to press another kiss onto the warm skin of his forehead before trailing downwards to his lips and placing a single one there. He pulled back, and after clearing his throat, placed his palm across his forehead. “You feel warm, but I don’t think you’re running a temperature, which is something.” Clark pulled his hand away and slid off the bed. “I'll be as fast as I can, just hold tight here, okay?” After throwing on a fresh shirt and slipping on his sandals, he was off.

He also wasn’t lying when he said he'd be as fast as he could. Whilst he ordinarily tried to uphold the image of a regular ole human sailor, with his regular ole boat; in times of need he was known to break that perception, though always within reason.

Such as today, where he didn’t even bother to use his boat and simply flew the distance to Cottonwood.

It was as he flew, that he chose to land on the beach on the other side of the island. For one, it was far away from the dock, so the potential questions he might receive from Porter or anyone else as to where his boat was or how he even got there, hopefully wouldn't occur. For another, this side of the island was far less populated and Clark figured he knew why the moment he landed.

With only a few errant construction workers milling about nearby, it didn’t take much else to convince him that this must have been Tom’s farm, though calling it a farm now was wholly inaccurate. After all, all of the land had been dug up, with concrete foundations now in place of fields and new stud walls in place of barns.

He noticed the fencing and tape all around the place as well as the sign warning that trespasses would be dealt with. He debated going all the way around the plot, but given he could see the road he needed right across the way, he figured he'd take his chances. He ducked under the tape and kept walking.

The construction workers didn't notice him as he quickly made his way though and he had just managed to duck under the tape on the other side before he heard a voice call his name.

He stilled and turned only to find Walter there with a hard hat waving at him. A woman stood beside him, dressed in clothing that Clark would have thought more fitting for a runway than a construction yard. She too was watching him. He sent them both a nod, hoping that it looked like he was only passing by.

Walter approached him and the women followed a few steps behind. "I thought that was you, having a look at the build, are we?"

"Yeah." Clark said with a curt nod. "Was just passing by and figured i'd stop and look."

"If you'd like, you could come on in and get a better look. I can get one of the boys to get you a helmet, I was actually showing Ms. Kyle around the place so it would be no trouble at all."

"I appreciate the offer, Walter." He said. "But I got a few errands to run. Maybe another time?"

Walter opened his mouth, but as he did, a rather more melodious voice found Clark's ears instead. "That is a shame, I was rather looking forward to having a little company on the tour."

Clark found his gaze drawn to the women, and the moment his eyes found hers, a spark of recognition hit him, only to be swiped away not even a moment later. He knew her, somehow, but from where, he didn't know.

Walter looked between the two before seeming to remember himself. "Ah, of course introductions." He held his hand out towards the women. "Ms. Kyle, this is Clark Kent, another prospective buyer."

Clark made a face at the term. Apparently taking a business card and being polite meant Clark was a 'prospective buyer' but he didn't feel now was the right time or place to try and argue with that,

instead he gave a nod. “How do you do, Ms. Kyle.”

“Clark.” The women repeated, her mouth moving around the word like it was a piece of candy. She sent him a coy smile. “And please, there’s no need for formalities. You can call me Selina.”

“Right.” He said, more to himself. He’d hoped the name would have triggered something, but it didn’t and if anything only had him growing more confused. “Well, it was nice to see you Walter, Selina, but I better be going.”

He waved to the pair of them as they both made their way further into the construction sight. Despite the heels she wore, Selina navigated the uneven muddy surfaces with a cat-like grace, one that again, only had Clark wondering just what she was doing here.

As he made his way into town, he thought about dropping in to see Lucy. It had been a while since their last chat, and he was somewhat looking forward to a catch up, however brief. In the end he didn’t, as upon looking into the store he saw Barbara talking to a boy about her age inside. Judging by the laughter and gratuitous playing of hair, Clark had a feeling it was a case of a high school flirting and no amount of persuasion would convince Clark it would be a good idea to get in the middle of that.

He kept walking and only a few doors down, happened upon the pharmacy. He walked inside and the pharmacist at the counter looked up at him, and upon gazing at her name badge, Clark took it in. Anaya. “Welcome.” She said. “Anything I can help you with today, sir?”

Clark had thought to simply trawl through the isles and grab anything and everything he thought might help, but speaking with a healthcare professional seemed like a good idea, even if the health care in question was technically for someone of a different species. “Yeah." Clark said as he approached. “My partner has a bad stomach ache. I was looking to get something to help with it.”

“Right.” Anaya said as she set her hands on the counter. “Have they been experiencing any nausea or vomiting?”

“No.” Clark said, shaking his head. “At the moment… They look like they’re in more pain than anything.”

“And how long has this been going on for?”

“They seemed a bit out of it yesterday, but it didn’t look like they were in real pain until this morning.”

“Whereabouts is the pain?”

Clark gestured to his own stomach. “Around here, maybe lower so more like--” he rested his palm just beneath his belly button and Anaya nodded.

“Okay." Anaya let out as her expression grew thoughtful. “If they aren't vomiting and the pain is located lower in the abdomen, it could be anything ranging from constipation to appendicitis. As you can imagine, one is relatively easy to treat with medication and the other is rather serious. I'd suggest visiting your local GP as they’d be better at giving you a concrete diagnosis.”

“Oh.” Clark made a face as he swallowed. “That’s not really an option for us.”

Something in Anaya’s expression changed, and her head tilted to the side. “Is that so?”

Clark wanted to slap himself the moment the words left his mouth. *Wonderful, idiot, you may as well have told her you're talking about a mer.* His mind scrambled for something, anything, that could justify why going to the doctor was impossible, and as his eyes scanned the leaflets and boxes of medication around him, one idea came to him and it was as though God himself blessed him with the knowledge. “You see, we’re not insured.” Clark said, and as she remained quiet, he went on. “So I was hoping to just grab a few things from here instead.”

Her face expression remained the same for a few seconds before it softened. She nodded then, sending him an understanding smile. “That’s understandable. A few of my customers are in much the same boat.”

“Yeah.” Clark said, fighting the urge to let out a sigh of relief. He instead looked around the shelves to try and avoid her gaze. “So is there anything you could suggest?”

She made her way from behind the counter to the shelves near Clark and started picking up a few items and setting them down. “Well, if the pain is muscular, I'd say managing it is where you’d want to start. Something like aspirin or ibuprofen will help with the inflammation, maybe even a hot water bottle to soothe the ache. If however the pain is in their stomach or intestines, you’ll need to monitor them more closely; ensure that if they do start vomiting, that there isn’t any blood present, likewise with their stools. If their stool is loose, imodium is the way forward, if they aren't going to the bathroom at all, laxatives would be the alternative, but if it is appendicitis, you will need to see a GP. That is something I cannot help with.”

As Clark looked down at the small pile of medication, he nodded. “Right, I think that covers the bases then.”

“I would say so.” Anaya said as she went back around the counter and started ringing him up. “Obviously, I don’t need to tell you not to give all of this to them at once. Try and figure out what their symptoms are telling you and make your choice from there, and of course, if their symptoms do get worse, or the medication isn't working, I would again strongly advise you see a GP. I know it's costly without insurance, but it could be the difference between life and death.”

“Got it.” Clark said as he pulled out a few notes and handed them over to her in exchange for the small plastic bag. “Thanks for your help.”

“It was my pleasure, take care.”

After leaving, Clark made his way back over to the construction zone. He’d hoped that Selina and Walter had moved onto a different part of the development by now and when he returned he was thankful to find that was indeed the case. He walked through the area without bumping into anyone else, but as he made his way onto the beach, he noticed there was now someone there.

The boy didn’t notice him, opting instead to keep his stare out towards the sea. Clark debated trying to fly away then and there, but as if sensing his presence, the boy then turned and spotted him.

As he took in his face, Clark thought boy was probably too inaccurate a descriptor. He was a teenager, the same age as Barbara and the other teen he’d seen in Lucy's shop if he had to guess, and upon seeing Clark, he only raised a single brow before turning back to the water. “You’re trespassing.” He said.

Clark huffed at that. “You are too.”

“No, I'm not.” He said, shaking his head. “My mom bought this dump. My family owns it, ergo, you’re trespassing.”

“You're--” Clark opened his mouth in quiet disbelief. “You’re Selina’s son?”

“You know my mom, huh?” He turned back around and eyed Clark. “That why you think it's okay to walk around like you own the place?”

“I wasn’t--” Clark cut himself off, heaving a sigh that morphed into an exasperated huff. “Listen kid, I don’t have time for--”

“It's not ‘kid’.” The teen said. He stood up then and brushed the sand off himself. Watching him, Clark found he was surprised to see how tall he was; how broad his shoulders were. He couldn’t fathom that the woman he had seen could in any way be his mother, and yet, those same green eyes he saw on her, were on him too. “It’s Jason. Asswipe.”

Apparently he didn’t inherit her politeness, and Clark only frowned at the derisive sneer on the teens face. “You speak to everyone like that?” He asked.

“When they’re asswipes like you, sure.” Jason said, as he shoved his hands into his pockets. “Also, if you're here to try and bone my mom, just know i'll rip your spinal cord out.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “And so friendly too, I can see why you’re sitting out here all alone.”

“Alone?” Jason said, with a huff of laughter. “Please. Out here, you’re never alone.”

Clark saw something then, out in the water. When he focused in he saw the tip of a tail before it descended into the depths. Clark’s mouth fell open, and he felt a wash of understanding come over himself. “That’s a very good point.”

“What can I say? I’m full of wisdom.” Jason shrugged before making his way past him, and it was only then that Clark noticed the limp in his step. “Bye bye, Mr. Asswipe. Come here again and I’ll

call the cops on you.” He called out over his shoulder. By the time Clark turned to reply, the teen was already up off the dune, walking across the dirt ridden construction site.

Clark watched him for a little while longer and once he was sure he was alone, he used a quick burst of speed and flew off. Not even a few minutes later, he was back home, walking into his cabin.

He found Blue in much the same way he had left him; on the bed, clutching his stomach. Upon looking into the tub, Clark noticed something that looked vaguely like it could have been expelled from a body in the water, but there was no blood, so Clark didn’t feel the need to do a more thorough examination than that.

“You feeling any better?” He asked as he sat down on the edge of the bed. Blue looked up at him, and after a few half hearted chirps Clark gathered his answer was a resounding ‘no.’ He only nodded. “Alright, hopefully I got you something that will help…”

He dumped the contents of the bag out onto the bed and then turned his attention back to the mer. “Okay, now uh, can you go to the bathroom?”

Blue made a face and looked into the tub, Clark only shook his head. “Yeah yeah I know-- I *saw*-- I just meant, did it hurt?”

Blue shook his head.

“Okay.” Clark muttered as he swept the imodium and laxatives to the side. “You think you might have strained it yesterday? Your stomach, I mean. Maybe when you were out swimming?”

Blue thought for a moment, and then gave a noncommittal shrug, which caused Clark to lift up the hot water bottle. “Either way, I think this will help. I'm gonna go fill it and then you can try taking a few painkillers.”

He had to go to his boat to fill up the bottle. He only had one kettle in his possession and the small kitchenette in the boat was where it resided. After filling the bottle with the boiling liquid he made his way back inside and passed the bottle over.

The noise Blue made the second it pressed against his stomach was one Clark couldn't help but laugh at. The mer turned to his side and immediately curled around the bottle, rubbing it across the abdomen in long, slow swipes. “So it is muscular, huh? Lois used hot water bottles a lot when she got cramps or sore muscles. They help a ton.”

But Blue wasn’t paying attention anymore, his eyes already drifting closed. Clark could imagine he was tired, if he was in pain for most of the night, sleep must have been difficult. “Before you fall asleep, let's give you something else to help with the pain.” He picked up the packet of ibuprofen and then looked at the dosage. Adults two pills. Children one. Clark made a face. *What, were you expecting them to put mer dosages on there?*

Clark decided that despite the tail, a mer would most likely need the higher dose just like a human adult, so he popped two out of the blister packet and slipped them between the mer's teeth. “Don’t chew on them.” He said firmly, and judging by the mer's grumble he was right to say it. He reached under his bed for a bottle of water, and lifted Blue's head up slightly as he let him take a few draws of it. “Swallow 'em down. It will take a little while for them to work, but it should make the pain go away all together.”

After swallowing them, Blue resumed his earlier attempts of sleep, now making the occasional chirp rather than groan. Clark watched him for a moment, and as his breathing evened out Clark found his hand moving towards his face, swiping the strands of hair away and tucking them behind his ear.

As the hours went by, Clark did his chores, and occasionally checked in on the mer. It was as the sun set that he finally awoke, and Clark came back inside. He found the mer on the bed, swiping his hand across his stomach, his face full of confusion. “It's the painkillers.” Clark said as he went towards the bed. “Whatever is causing the pain is still there, but the painkillers just sort of make it go away for a little while. I might need to give you some more if it gets worse again.”

Blue nodded at that, though his hand still remained where it was, swiping across the skin. Clark brought his own hand there and felt it. It was still warm, but the spasming seemed to have lessened considerably. “So you have any idea what it is?” Clark asked, hoping now he’d finally be able to get an answer.

A shrug was all he got, and Clark found himself sighing. Despite knowing he wasn't going to get a ten page essay on what was wrong with the mer, he had hoped for something other than a single shrug. Perhaps he was in the same boat Clark was in, maybe what he was feeling was entirely new, but if that were the case that only had Clark's worry grow. *But if it is appendicitis, you will need to see a GP. That is something I cannot help with.*

Could mer's even get appendicitis? Do they have appendices? Clark didn't know, and that general miasma of unknown was weighing heavy on him.

At least he looks okay now, he told himself. Whatever was the cause of this strange ache seemed to have been dealt, and as long as it didn't get worse, Clark felt safe in assuming the mer would be fine. He'd just have to wait and see if that remained the case.

Chapter End Notes

More mysteries as well as more faces on the island. I wonder what it could all mean? (°ʖ°)

Also I hope you all enjoyed the art this chapter! On the left is a piece I did of Blue and Clark and on the right is a wonderful piece by the even more wonderful Keagan of Blue!

I will also put a link to my own Tumblr here. I post my art on there, so if you wanna see it first before I put it in the fic, or even send me an ask, that's the place to go ;) It's pretty much exclusively Superbat themed XD

Anyway, as always, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. If you did be sure to let me know and I will catch you all on the next chapter! Take care <3

Chapter 22

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Well, at least he didn't die.

That was an overstatement of course, or understatement depending on your viewpoint. After all, most people didn't just keel over dead whenever they got sick. In reality, the fact that Clark breathed such a sigh of relief when Blue started to get better was an overreaction considering the circumstances.

For obvious reasons though, Clark didn't care. He'd pray to every God going a hundred times over if it meant never having to go through *that* again. The uncertainty, the anguish, the fear, all of it culminating into a pit of anxiety so deep within Clark that you could drop a penny into it and even as the days rolled by, you still wouldn't hear it hit the bottom.

That was past him now though, sort of; the pit was still there-- in reality it had been there a *very* long time, and if anything Blue's illness only sought to deepen it-- but it had filled in considerably since he began to get better, and really, was starting to feel more like a ditch. A manageable ditch.

With the painkillers and hot water bottle, Blue never got as bad he had done last time around. He threw up a couple times, sure, but it seemed as though that had less to do with whatever he may or may not have eaten and more to do with his near violent stomach cramps he was experiencing instead. Of course, whenever this happened Clark's mind immediately took to repeating the word 'appendicitis' like a claxon until he was sure it was the only word that actually existed.

And yet, despite those fears, as Blue got better, the alarm would lessen, until today where it had all but stopped entirely. Blue was better after all, back to eating, back to swimming, back to annoying the ever loving shit out of Clark.

"I told you." Clark ground out as he threw the hunk of fish at Blue. "Stop hiding shit in my bed!"

From his tub, Blue didn't even have the decency to look apologetic, simply picking up the fish and eating it with a roll of the eyes.

Clark didn't have the energy to berate him further, choosing instead to simply glare at him as he made his way outside. Today was already enough of a weight on his mind, and having Blue return to his usual self only eased him somewhat.

Today is the day, he thought grimly as he got himself ready.

August seventeenth. Lois' birthday. The date of her death. The date of a lot of people's deaths. The date of a whole city--

Come on, don't think about it, and Clark did just that, managing to all but shake those thoughts from his mind by the time he was by the outhouse, and they'd gone almost entirely as he was walking back to his cabin. That was, until he stepped inside and saw the bag sitting beside his desk.

"Fuck me." He whispered as he wiped his face. Blue's ears twitched at the sound and his head tilted to the side. Clark waved him off. "Not you, I'm not mad at you." He said as he sat down at the desk. "It's just that I've got to go to Cottonwood today."

He supposed he didn't actually *have* to go. After all, Marcos knew what he was going through and seemed as though he'd understand if Clark never showed up. He could even go there tomorrow. Or next week. Yes, Clark could see it now, he'd walk in and say, '*sorry Marcos, I would have loved to come see you sooner, but the weight of my family's death was particularly bad on your birthday and I just felt like crawling into a hole for a week. Anyway, here's your present.'*

Clark heaved a sigh. No. He couldn't do that to him. In fact, the only thing that had even gotten him out of bed this morning (aside from the fish that he discovered wedged beneath his mattress, of course) was the thought of Marcos all alone at the shop, waiting for him. He couldn't disappoint him, not today.

"It's Marcos' birthday." Clark said, despite the fact that Blue was paying about as much attention to him as an artistic student in math class. He didn't even deign to look up at Clark as he got dressed and picked up the bag from the floor. Clark debated just walking out and leaving it at that, but in the end he spoke. "I'll see you when I get back."

After the disinterest, Clark expected Blue to remain in the tub long after he had left, but no, the moment he walked out across the sand he heard the tell tale thump followed by the sound of wet skin

across the floor. When the sound turned to that of shifting sand, he looked down to find the mer looking back at him, frowning. “What?” He asked.

The mer pointed at the bag, then at himself.

“No, this isn’t for you. I told you, it’s for Marcos.”

Blue shook his head, and reached for the bag.

Clark lifted it up and away.

“It's been there for two weeks, and you haven't touched it, but the second I say it's not for you, you want it.” He shook his head, and despite it all, smiled. “God, you’re a brat...”

Blue managed to look both annoyed and proud at the comment, and rather than try and reach for the bag again, he instead lay across the sand, showing his belly to Clark as he stood there.

For a moment Clark was more confused than anything. He knew Blue’s mind worked in mysterious ways, but for some reason this gesture really threw him. The way he shifted from side to side across the sand in an almost hypnotic motion had Clark staring at the taunt muscles of his midsection intently. “Uh, I don’t know what you’re trying to pull here, but…”

Blue let out a quiet purr, and Clark had to look away as his face grew hot. “Alright. I’m going now.”

But Blue's hand was on his ankle and he made that same noise again; a rumble, low in his throat.

Where Blue’s hand lay, Clark could feel heat. He knew it was all psychological. Blue was cold to the touch most of the time, and yet, right now, his hand felt sweltering and that heat only seemed to travel upward from him, until it settled in Clark’s belly, causing it to flutter. “God, you’re so--” Clark ground out as he crouched down beside Blue. “What do you want from me?”

Blue didn’t offer any chirps or gestures, he just looked at Clark.

There was something in his stare that only caused Clark’s stomach to grow tighter; for that heat to spread and cause him to have to readjust how he was crouched lest certain parts of himself got the wrong idea. “Look, if you quit acting weird, i’ll get you some beef while i'm at Cottonwood, okay?”

Somehow he knew that wasn’t what Blue wanted, and yet at the words, whatever act he was doing, dropped and he sat up and shimmied the rest of the way to the ocean. As Clark watched, he almost wished he could take it back. He was sure if Blue could have done, he’d have said what he really wanted in that moment, and Clark was certain whatever he had said, he’d have done.

There was no time to dwell on that though. He still had plans after all, so he continued to the boat, but as he did, called out. “Alright, you know the drill, don’t follow me. I’ll be back in a few hours so just keep out of trouble.”

From the water, Blue’s ears twitched, and after a moment he sent Clark a nod before diving down.

On the journey over to Cottonwood, he nearly stopped the boat to yell at Blue for doing exactly what he was asked *not* to do. After all, if he was going to follow him the least he could do was be subtle about it. Thankfully, it never came to that as Blue did eventually change course, and in the end, Clark heard his heartbeat slow to the same methodical beat that let him know he was deep down underwater.

That’s something at least, Clark thought. If he was deep underwater again, it was less likely for humans to get him.

But more likely for the mers to.

Clark fought the urge to smack himself as the thought came to him. *He’ll be fine.* He told himself. *He is a grown ass mer, he can handle himself and you know it.*

The words did little to dissuade the ever present part of Clark’s mind responsible for exaggeration and mistruth. He wondered if that part of himself would ever truly go, but given his track record for these things, he didn’t hold out much hope.

It was part of why he was entertaining the idea of seeing Dinah again. She had helped him long ago and he knew all it would take for it to happen once again was a single phone call. Yet he knew that phone call wouldn't happen for a long time, not while every part of himself screamed at the mere thought of speaking to her.

He wondered if Diana still spoke to her. *Of course she does.* Would she have told her about their last conversation? *Definitely,* Clark's mind taunted. *She's already well aware of how messed up you are, and you know it.*

Yet despite the obvious drawbacks, there was a glimmer of hope nestled in and amongst all that fear; the idea of speaking to someone from his old life, especially one that was trained to help him rather than brate him, was enticing. He knew deep within himself, that no matter what Dinah was told, it would all be put aside should Clark choose to talk to her. She'd feigh a level of ignorance so sincere, that Clark wouldn't even be able to tell if she were lying or not. It was that level of professionalism that Clark admired about her.

The only issue was that the more Clark thought about it the more that glimmer felt all too insubstantial when compared to all the shit he'd have to shake off to get to it.

Just the idea of speaking to her, the thought of seeing Ollie, or anyone else for that matter. He'd be able to read them with a single look, would be able to see their concern and fear as if they were hanging it around their necks. The judgement, that was what he couldn't bare to see. He remembers the sight of it on Diana's face, and he didn't want anyone else to look at him like that.

As his stomach twisted for what felt like the tenth time that morning, he realised this was something to deal with another day. Whilst it would be a good and most definitely smart idea for him to talk to someone, today was already enough of a weight on his mind that adding to it with the thoughts of seeing his old coworkers again was a recipe for disaster.

He instead tried to focus on the positives of today. For one, Blue was better. For another, he was off to see Marcos, and hopefully the sight of his face upon opening his presents would make Clark think that it really was a good idea to come out today of all days.

After mooring in Cottonwood he made his way up the high street, bags in toe, and whilst he half expected to see the store would be closed today, he wasn't surprised to see it wasn't. Marcos was inside, sat by the counter in the completely empty store.

The image of him staring down at an open magazine in pure boredom was just like the one Clark had imagined, only in his imagination, he wasn't here, he was at home under a blanket waiting for the sun to go down and usher in the next day.

Seeing Marcos made him thankful he didn't decide to do that.

He opened the door and as the bell jingled, Clark heard the tell tale huff of a dog. Clark sent him a nod. "Hey, Lindo."

Whilst he knew the dog couldn't exactly nod back, his head settled back against the bed with the same sort of ease one might give in response to a greeting. Clark then turned his attention to the only other person inside and smiled. "Hey birthday boy."

"You--" Marcos swallowed as he stood up from the stool. "You came." He finished with a look of awe on his face.

"Well, I told you I would, didn't I?" Clark approached the counter and set the bag on top of it. "I didn't get a cake or anything, but I figured you'd like this stuff, so, happy birthday."

"You didn't have to get me anything…" Marcos said with that same sense of false modesty that most people displayed when they received a present they secretly wanted. That act of course went out the window the moment he peered inside. "No way." He muttered as he riffled through the bag and began pulling out its contents. "You got me a-- but they-- and the games--" all of a sudden he turned a fierce frown up towards Clark. "You told me you were broke!"

Clark only shrugged a shoulder. "Only marginally."

Marcos rolled his eyes at the cooment and upon looking over the games he head shook in disbelief. "This is too much, Clark, I can't accept this."

He blew a raspberry. "Uh, like Hell you can't. What am I gonna do with it? I dunno how to play--" He picked up a random game, "'Animal crossing'."

“No, that's not--” Marcos took a breath and looked down. “I just meant, this is a lot of money, and… I can't--”

“Yes you can.” Clark said firmly. “I got this for you, for *your* birthday, so enjoy it.”

“I--" Clark could see the fact he wanted to argue, but perhaps sensing the losing battle ahead, wisely decided against it. After a moment, he sent a shy small towards Clark, and he didn’t need superpowers to hear the honesty in his next words. “Thank you, Clark… I love it.”

“Don’t mention it.” He said with a wave of the hand. His stomach felt warm as he watched Marcos pour over the games and he sent a look to the bag still on the counter. “Now, you gonna open your card?”

“Oh, there's a card?" Marcos said as he looked into the bag once more, and this time spotted the white envelope pressed to the side. Clark had a feeling if he hadn’t mentioned it, it wouldn't have ever been spotted and knowing Clark’s luck, might have even ended up in the trash. Instead, Marcos lifted it out and opened it up.

He pulled out the card, and upon opening it, a slip of paper fell out. Clark waited for him to read the short message inside, and watched as his eyes trailed along the words. “Dear Marcos, happy birthday, from Clark and… Blue?”

“Yeah..." Clark muttered as he cleared his throat. It had sounded less dumb when he wrote it but now, hearing it out loud, it only made his face hot with embarrassment. “This present is sort of from his as well.”

“What? You mean the games?”

“No, the cheque.”

Marcos looked dubious as he picked up the slip of paper that had fallen onto the counter, and not even a second later he dropped it, retracting his hand like it had been burnt. “What the fuck? What the *fuck*, Clark?”

Yesterday, whilst Blue had been asleep, Clark sailed out to Sacramento to collect his new bankcard, and whilst looking over his accounts, found that a large sum of money had already been deposited by the Dalton's. Whilst he'd had this idea for an 'extra' present for a while-- from the moment he'd heard Marcos utter the word 'bills,' in fact-- he didn't fully realise it until he was about to leave the bank and instead turned around and spoke to a clerk about opening a checking account. Now, he was here, using his first cheque in four years.

"Long story short, Blue found a bunch of pirate gold a couple weeks back and I got it evaluated and it may or may not have been worth a lot." Clark said with a flourish of the hand. "So, happy birthday!"

"This is--" Marcos picked up the cheque again and this time Clark could see how his hands were shaking as his eyes reread the words on it. "This says it's for two hundred thousand dollars."

"It would have been more but i'm still waiting for the rest of the money to come into my account." Clark sat down on the stool in front of the counter, and without asking, reached for one of the cans of cola there. He cracked it open and took a sip. "But yeah, I figured two hundred thousand would be enough for your dads bills, at least for now, but obviously if you need more, we can cross that bridge when we come to it."

"My dad's--" Marcos looked up at him then, his eyes filling with tears. "You-- but this-- I--"

Clark held up his hand before any more half sentences could come out. "Marcos, i'm going to say this one last time, and once i'm done talking you are going to respond with another 'thank you' and that's it, no 'I can't accept this' or 'this is too much'. You're a good kid, and at the end of the day, I wanted to do this for you, okay?"

Marcos' mouth opened, and after a few seconds of bobbing lips and shaky breaths, he heard it, a quiet, "thank you."

"You're welcome." Clark responded in turn before taking another sip of cola. "Now, you gonna play one of your games or are we just gonna sit here doing nothing?"

After that, Marcos unboxed his console and games with unbridled glee. He picked one of the games and put the cartridge into the console before turning it on, he then lent across the counter and showed Clark the screen. He watched it with the same interest he was sure most adults exhibited when being

shown something that was far beyond their comprehension. He just hoped that he sounded at least a little bit invested as Marcos started telling him about the different kinds of fruit trees.

It was about half an hour later that the front door bell chimed. Almost immediately, Marcos slid his console out of view, but the moment he saw who was at the door, he brought it back. “Oh, hey Barbara, what are you doing here?”

“Uh, did you forget it's your birthday or…?” She walked in and sent Clark a small smile. “Hey, Clark.”

“Hey, Barb.” He said with a nod, his eyes then went to the cupcake in her hands. “That for me?”

She rolled her eyes. “Haha, very funny.” She said as she walked to the counter and set the cake down. After producing a lighter from her pocket, she lit the candle on it and slid it over to Marcos. “Happy birthday, Marcos! Now blow it out and make a wish.”

“Thanks, Barbara.” He said with a smile, before leaning over and blowing it out. He then lifted the cake and took a bite. After swallowing, he let out a hum of appreciation. “This is amazing.”

“Why, thank you.” She said with a small bow. “So, are we still on for later?”

“Right, about that--" Marcos set the cake down, his eyes settling on the cheque still on the counter. He covered it with his hand before looking to Barbara and giving his best nonchalant shrug. “I was thinking I could shut the shop early and we could all hang out now. That is, if everyone’s still free.”

“Yeah?” Barbara said, raising a brow. “But I thought you said you had to work all day?”

“Yeah, but you also said Dick and Jason are heading back to Sacramento tonight so if we’re all gonna hang, I figured it would be better to do it earlier rather than later, you know?”

“I guess.” Barbara said, her tone rife with suspicion. “As long as you’re sure, I don't want you getting in trouble. Dick and Jay said they can hang for a little bit before they go, so like, don’t think you have to close early for them.”

Marcos smiled then, a genuine one filled with mirth. “Seriously, it’s cool.”

Barbara still didn’t look convinced, but that didn’t last long as she gave a shrug and started walking towards the door. “Well, okay then, i'll get Jay and Dick. You know where their beach is, right? I'll grab the stuff from my place and meet you there.” Barbara sent another nod to Clark. “See you around, Clark.”

“See you, Barbara.”

After the jingle sounded Clark turned to Marcos, a brow raised. “So, little birthday get together, eh?”

Marcos gave a faint blush. “It's not like that.”

“I dunno…” Clark said with a smile. “Barbara is a very pretty girl, and you’re a very handsome lad. I can see it happening.”

“She’s also very into Dick, and I’m…” Marcos’ blush grew. “Not.”

Clark frowned. “Not into Dick?”

“No no, I’m into dick.” Marcos said almost absent mindedly, before his face grew beat red. “What I meant to say is--”

As Marcos’ mouth bobbed open and closed, Clark fought back a grin, with limited success. “What you meant to say is…?” He prompted.

“It’s…” he looked away. “Jason.” He whispered.

“Jason?”

“I like… Jason.”

“You--” It took a moment for Clark to process the words, but when he did, he shook his head. “No.”

“No what?” Marcos asked.

“No, you’re too good for him.” Clark crossed his arms. “I forbid it.”

Marcos smiled at that, and almost immediately whatever embarrassment he seemed to exhibit, was gone. “Come on, he’s really sweet.”

“To you maybe, to me, he's an asshole.”

“How do you know that?”

“How do you think I know? I met him on his family’s beach, and he was an asshole.”

“Wait.” Marcos pulled back then, a wide grin spreading across his face. “No way. Were you the homeless looking guy on the beach?”

Clark’s eyebrows raised. “*Homeless looking?* ” He repeated incredulously.

Marcos laughed then, and it sounded all the louder from echoing around the empty store. “*Oh my God* , when he told us about this homeless guy who was giving him attitude, me and Barb were trying to figure out who it could be, I never would have thought it was you!” Marcos wiped his eyes then. “That’s so funny.”

Clark looked down at himself. “I go out of my way to buy new clothes and get called ‘homeless looking.’” He muttered. “Great.”

“Aww.” Marcos said, smiling. “Don’t be like that, Jason didn’t mean it.”

“If you say so.” Clark said, unconvinced.

“It’s true." Marcos said, stepping away from the counter. He went for his jacket and after slipping his wallet and the cheque into his pockets he whistled and Lindo got up from his bed. “Dick told me Jason’s tough guy act, is just that, an act. He’s actually a big softie deep down under all the attitude.”

“They’re close friends then I take it?”

“Well, yeah, they’re brothers.” Marcos said as stuffed his hands into his pockets.

Clark balked. “*Brothers* ? Wait, that means...” he made a face, he didn’t want to know what that meant.

“Yeah, they’re mom had them when she was young. They’re twins, apparently.” Marcos shrugged his shoulders. “Non identical obviously. I mean, they look nothing alike.”

Clark wondered if the person he’d seen talking with Barbara had been the boy in question. He didn’t exactly get a good look at him, but he saw enough to know Marcos was correct. He and Jason barely looked like they could pass for cousins, let alone brothers. In the end Clark didn’t say much to the revelation, not that he felt he should have done. He barely knew Selina, and beyond their conversation on the beach, he barely knew Jason as well. He hoped to keep it that way, as he felt more contact with the strange family than necessary would be a bad idea. Something about their eyes, that’s what had him dubious. There was something in their gaze that had him on edge.

He was so consumed by the thought that it took Marcos coming right up beside him and rocking on his heels to pull him from it. He saw Marcos’ appearance and was finally able to put everything together; the jacket, Lindo and the keys now in his hands. He stood up and clapped his hands together. “Right then, i'll get out of your hair.”

“You could come too, you know, if you wanted.” Marcos said, escorting Clark to the door.

“Hum... a party with a bunch of teenagers?” Clark asked himself thoughtfully, before turning to Marcos and smiling. “Thanks, but I think i'll pass.”

“Hey, i'm not a teenager anymore.” Marcos beamed.

“God, you’re right. You’re an adult.” Clark shivered. “The world really is a strange place...”

“Haha.” Marcos said, and after Lindo trotted out, he locked the door to the store behind him and slid down the shutters. “Now, I'm gonna head that way.” He said, pointing down the main street that led towards Walter’s development. “I’ll see you around, Clark.”

“Take care, Marcos.” He said before he crouched down to pat Lindo’s head. “You keep him safe, Lindo.”

The dog barked and with that the pair made their way up the street. Clark watched them for a while and only once he saw Marcos walk into the small bank on his way up the street did he continue on his way to the marina.

Despite the date, Clark felt great. So much so that he couldn’t help the small pang of guilt he felt as a result. He tried to ignore it, and remind himself of why he was feeling good in the first place. Seeing Marcos happy, knowing that his birthday was all the better for him showing up, that was what fueled him so that was what he focused on.

By the time he returned home, he half expected Blue to be back at the island, but that wasn’t the case. He must have still been out swimming, but Clark assumed he was making up for time spent stuck inside, and most likely wouldn't be back till later.

Now that he was alone and had done his duties for the day, he allowed himself to do what he normally did on this day. He took a deep breath and went towards the treeline, walking through them until he

came upon the meadow. After making his way towards the graves, he lay down across the grass and looked up towards the sky. “Happy birthday, Lois.” He said, closing his eyes.

He trained his ears towards the sound of the wind, hoping somehow in and amongst it there would be a response. There wasn’t, of course. There hadn’t been the previous times he had done this either, and yet, he always held out hope one day that would change. He opened his eyes and stared at a lone cloud drifting along and turned his head slightly towards the graves. “It’s Marcos’ birthday today, too.” He said softly.

“That's why I'm a little late today.” He said, folding his hands across his stomach. “I didn’t forget or anything. Promise.”

More silence, though Clark felt his breath hitch as a breeze rolled through the meadow. The leaves rustled softly. He smiled at it. “I’ll sit with you both for a little while, but then i’m gonna head back. I bet you’re both busy up there, anyways… you think Perry got you the right cake this time, Lo?” And despite how his eyes began to water, he smiled.

Another breeze and this time, he felt it across his face, gentle, like a soft breath. He closed his eyes and allowed the feeling of it to wash over him.

He lost track of time as he half dozed on the grass. Eventually, he cracked his eyes open and saw the sky had grown darker, bringing a chill right along with it. He sat up then, turning his head slightly towards the wooden plaque. He set his palm gently on top of it. “Alright, i'm heading back now. Take care you two, and holler if you need me.”

He got up and began to walk. As he left the trees and stepped back out onto the beach, he was briskly brought back to the here and now. He often forgot himself whilst in the meadow, but watching the waves and knowing who was out in them allowed him to put the past back where it was meant to be, at least for the time being.

As he walked further across the sand he noticed someone now under the jetty. He smiled as he approached the water and as he did he saw movement, the mer stirred and poked his head out above the surface, sending a glance towards Clark.

“Howdy.” Clark said as he watched the mer swim the short distance back to shore, and crawl his way out of the water. “You have a nice swim today?”

Blue chirped once, giving a nod.

“That’s good." Clark said, sitting down on the floor and letting Blue come up close beside him. “Cottonwood was nice. Marcos liked his presents.”

At the words Clark half expected Blue to begin his usual grumbling, but instead he brought his hand to his face, and pointed. At first, Clark was confused by the gesture but all at once realisation hit and his mouth fell open. He heaved a sigh. “God, I knew I was forgetting something...”

Despite his obvious lack of beef, Blue didn’t look annoyed this time, and only pointed at his mouth once more before pointing at Clark. “Yeah, I don't have any.” Clark said, pulling out his pockets as though to further illustrate his point.

But Blue simply repeated the gesture, and then came forward.

Clark is somewhat ashamed to admit it took him an extraordinary long time to figure out what was going on; in fact, it was after a solid minute of Blue’s lips pressed against his that he let out a quiet of ‘oh’ of realisation. “You just wanted a kiss.” Clark said as he pulled back.

Blue shook his head, and then fell to the side, laying his back across the sand like he had earlier that morning though, this time, unlike all the other times he acted strangely, there was no hint of mischievousness in his gaze, only a intense burning that Clark starkly realised he recognised as well.

“*Oh* .” Was all he said, and the moment he said it, Blue brought his hands to his stomach, stroking the skin along there as his eyes remained firmly on Clark.

“Uh.” Clark added, after the first utterance. He’d hoped more words would follow but apparently his mind was in short supply of them given how focused it was on keeping his eyes firmly glued to Blue midsection.

So this is what mer seduction is like , Clark thought absently as he went into his second minute of not blinking. He supposed he should have expected Blue to rely more so on his body when it came to these things, given his ability to speak was on par with a mountain goat. Despite this, Clark was not at all prepared for it. After all, it was a complete 180 for them; to go from bared teeth and screeching, to

rolling along the sand and purring was so jarring that it felt as though Clark's brain had simply short circuited.

As he watched, Clark realised he really didn't have any chance of ever avoiding this from happening. The more he thought about it, the more he found that everything the mer intrigued him in some way. His primal anger, his constant princess act, this current bout of blatant seduction. All of it culminated into something that ordinarily would put Clark right off, and yet, here he was, drooling like a senior at prom as he watched the mer move.

That, coincidentally, was what promptly caused Clark to wipe his mouth before the saliva stream became too prominent. After moving for the first time in several minutes, Blue quirked his head at him, a quiet purr leaving him. Clark had to swallow down the liquid that suddenly pooled in his mouth lest cause any further dribbling and after doing so, he looked at the mer, and cleared his throat. "Are you… are you?" *Are you what?* Clark wanted to hit himself sometimes, and yet apparently he wasn't even capable of that given his current inability to speak, let alone move.

Blue shifted across the sand once more. His eyes half lidded, and his lip between his teeth. He gave another purr and Clark swallowed thickly. "So just to clarify, you wish to--" he cleared his throat again when his voice hitched, "do *what* exactly?"

Blue watched him, and after a single ear twitch, rolled his eyes and sat up. His hand went to Clark's waist band, and rested there, his claw hanging around the elastic and tugging at it slightly. Clark recognized the movement, he'd done it before.

Clark stared at that hand for longer than necessary. *Was he…?*

"You want to… uh… my…" Clark trailed off, unsure what the rest of that sentence would even be had he finished it. He watched the mer for a little while longer, but his hand never moved, opting instead to stay exactly where it was. Was he waiting for Clark to make the first move? If that was the case he'd be waiting a while, Clark's mind was still bogged down with what was going on, that movement was pretty low on the priority list.

If he was making a pass at Clark, it wouldn't exactly be coming out of left field. They weren't exactly blushing middle schoolers here, and their relationship had definitely gone beyond the point of just 'two pals, palling it up'. They'd kissed, the mer-- accidental of no-- had seen his cock (and also happened to rub up against it, as well). Realistically, Clark was aware this was the next step; to actually, you know, do what everyone had been accusing him of doing since the mer came into his life.

Clark barely even realised he was doing it, but he brought his hands to his waist band, and slowly slid the fabric down.

Blue's eyes immediately went to his cock, and the undue attention already had him growing hard. The mer made a noise, like he had this morning, that same low purr that went straight to Clark's gut, and he bit his lip to prevent anything more obscene than a shaky breath leaving him. The mer wasn't even doing anything yet, just looking, and already Clark could feel his body growing clammy as though something much more salacious was occurring, perhaps because he was anticipating just that.

Then mer pointed at his mouth once more, and Clark swallowed. "I uh…" Clark let go of his waistband, and then with nothing to occupy his hands he began to wring them. "I don't understand…" he said lamely, despite getting a very clear idea of what was being asked of him.

The mer did it then, he moved, and despite Clark thinking he'd be ready for it, he still jerked away, stumbling backwards onto the sand. With his legs half tied up in his shorts still, it was hardly elegant and sand flew up into the air as he fell. After a beat, he pushed himself up onto his elbows and looked at the mer's surprised face. "Sorry," Clark blurted, his cheeks beet red, "you just surprised me."

Blue titled his head, and raised a brow. Clark could hear the silent question as clear as day. *Do you want this?*

Did he? Well, obviously he did. The moment that stupidly perfect face came into his life he knew this was going to happen. But the real question was did he feel *ready* for this?

That answer was no, a hard fat no, and yet his cock had other ideas.

This time, as Blue approached him he moved even slower, like a predator approaching its prey and that analogy did little to lessen Clark's rapidly hardening cock. By the time Blue's hands came to rest across his thighs he was hard, and his lip was firmly wedged between his teeth once more.

Blue looked at him then, and his hand went to Clark's cock, but stopped just short. His eyebrow raised once more, and Clark found he could do little more than nod or shake his head. One would end this right here and now, and the other would let it continue.

He chose the latter.

The moment he felt his touch, he gasped. Clark hadn't thought it would feel so alien, but it did. His own hand he knew intimately, and whilst he was definitely not inexperienced, it had been a very long time since he'd felt someone else's touch. So much so, that he felt his eyes begin to water to the point he had to crush them shut. *Don't think about that,* he told himself. *Stay here. Stay in the now.*

Blue didn't move for a while, and when Clark cracked an eyelid open, he realised why. He was watching him, his brow still raised in silent question. Clark hoped his face didn't convey any of the turmoil occurring internally, but it must have done if the faint sigh Blue gave was anything to go by. He let go, and if anything the lack of touch had Clark growing more panicked. "No," he blurted, "Please, don't stop, I--" he didn't finish his sentence, and he didn't need to apparently, as Blue then chose to point towards his mouth. Clark swallowed, "are you…?"

The mer didn't wait this time, leaning forward over Clark and taking his cock in his mouth in one fell swoop. Clark didn't even have time to be surprised with how thoroughly it took the breath out of him. He didn't know the exact name of the sound he made, but he made it, and he could almost feel the mer smile around him as he back to move.

The only thought that entered Clark's mind in the moment was the word 'teeth.' He had been worried about the mers teeth in such a delicate area, and despite knowing he wouldn't be able to hurt him, the discomfort was enough of a deterrent. Much like sand, sharp teeth on the dick are not conducive to a happy orgasm.

But there were no teeth, with each slide of his mouth, Clark only felt the warm slickness of a tongue, and a vibration that had his mind reeling. He was making that sound again, but this time Clark wasn't just hearing it, he was feeling it, and with each purr Clark's breath grew faster and louder. "Oh *fuck* ." He let out, his feet curling into the sand beneath them.

The mer's grip tightened around his thighs, his claws digging into the flesh there, holding him steady. There was a briskness to his movements, and as Clark watched him move he could see how flushed his face was. The sight, the feeling of it was all mounting and just when Clark thought he had a good handle on it all, Blue's eyes flicked up, and the moment he saw them Clark let out a choked gasp. "Fuck--" he yelled, after which a long string of other expletives followed. He fell back against the sand then, looking up into the sky as his mind and body took a breather after the marathon they'd both just performed.

Blue slid off of him then. Clark not only felt, but heard it. A wet pop that went right to his groin despite what it had just gone through. After a moment, he came into view above Clark, licking his lips. With an easy smile, he lowered himself and pressed them against Clark's. He could taste the salt

of the ocean as well as something far more personal, and he let out a breathy laugh. “That was…” when Blue pulled back, quirking his head. He continued. “Good.”

With that, Blue made another sound now, and fell beside Clark, stretching out once more.

Clark sat up on an elbow and watched him, but this time as he took in Blue’s body he noticed something was now diffirent. “*Oh.* ” he said, his throat growing dry.

He knew, logically, mer’s had to have genitals. Either they’d be like Clark’s or they’d be something more alien, but either way, he knew they had to have them for basic evolutionary reasons.

He just hadn’t put much thought as to what they would actually *look* like.

A tentacle. That was what Clark would describe what he was seeing. A tentacle was coming out of Blue and he didn’t know what to do with that information.

Obviously he knew it wasn’t a tentacle in the traditional sense. It didn’t have suction cups or anything, it was actually completely smooth, and a bright shade of pink that Clark was definitely not expecting. It was also wiggling, twitching from side to side across Blue’s front in such a way that it almost looked like it could be alive.

Apparently Blue was not a fan of Clark’s lack of movement and stunned silence as he gave a loud whine that morphed into a hiss. Clark bowed his head in embarrassment. “Sorry, i'm just… taking it in.” He said, his eyes flicking once more to the appendage.

It wiggled and Blue made a sound of frustration as he brought it hand to it. Almost immediately, it curled around his arm, and Clark's mouth fell open and despite it all, he felt his body growing warm once more. “Can I…?” he began, and at the words, Blue quirked a brow. “Can I touch it?” He finished.

Blue pursed his lips before nodding once and letting go. Without his hand there, his penis returned to roaming around, and only once Clark gingerly brought his fingers out to touch it, did it now curl around him.

He was surprised by the pressure. He didn’t know dicks could have a strong grip, but here one was, holding onto him with the same zeel as someone giving a particularly hearty handshake. Clark returned the favour, tightening the grip of his hand, and at the sensation, Blue’s head fell back, a long series of cries spilling out.

Clark couldn’t help but smile at the sight. He tried to slide his hand up and down, but the grip he was dealing with made that virtually impossible. Instead, he opted to tighten and loosen his own grip, changing the length or time or pressure of each press, and his grin only grew as Blue’s movements turned from simple wiggles to full on thrashing.

He didn’t know what compelled him, but he let go, and even though he was prepared for the screeching Blue would send his way, he still winced when it began. He didn’t have to deal with it for long though, as he brought his head down until his lips touched his cock.

Now, if Clark were to write a list of all the good ideas he’d ever had in life, he knew what would make the top of the list and what would make the bottom. Those rarely changed, with most new ideas falling into the middle somewhere. There had never been an idea that had upon first inception seemed like it would be right near the top, only for a moment later to plummet to the bottom.

Until now.

Blue’s cock, slid down his throat so quickly, and so violently, that Clark gagged around it. He knew if he needed to breathe, he wouldn't be able to with his entire esophagus being filled by Blue. It also didn’t help that the mer had now taken to holding his head in place, as his cock wriggled around inside him. He was sure had he been human, either the damage to his throat or the lack of air would have ended him and in the moment Clark really couldn't decide which was worse.

Blue was screaming with each trash of his body so right along with the burning pain in his throat, his ears were now along for the ride. Thankfully, the whole affair didn’t last that long and after about a minute, and one final scream, Blue lay limp beneath him.

He grimaced as he pulled away and felt Blue's cock slide out. He had to take a moment to compose himself and after a few deep breaths, he felt he had just that.

After that, his own arousal had been dealt with rather thoroughly, and the only thing he could think of to console himself was that he would *never* be doing that again.

But seeing how blissful Blue looked made that same thought morph into, *'okay, maybe on special occasions. But that's it.'*

Clark let out a shaky breath, as he looked down at the mer. "You alright there?" He said, surprised at how thoroughly wrecked his voice sounded.

Blue nodded, a tired grin on his face. He brought his hand up to touch Clark's cheek and made a quiet purr. Clark himself let out a sigh before returning his own smile. "You could have warned me your cock had a mind of its own, you know. I think I nearly died there."

Blue huffed at that, and even though Clark wasn't expecting any more concern given his usual penchant for acting disinterested, he sat up and placed his hand on Clark's stomach. He then looked up to Clark and raised a brow.

"It didn't go that far down." Clark said. "Luckily." he added, before bringing his own hand there, and for a moment, he could have sworn he felt a warm tingle in his stomach.

As the seconds ticked by, he realised he was not mistaken. His stomach was tingling, growing hot even, and it wasn't just his stomach, his face, his chest, his, well, everywhere felt warm.

He gave a heady laugh. "I feel weird..." he muttered to the mer, who's expression could only be described as apologetic. "No, I feel better than weird, I feel..."

He felt great, better than great, he felt like he could conquer the world. He stood up and shook the shorts from his legs, before taking off his shirt as well. It would only slow him down, he thought. "I'm gonna get some ice cream." He said before walking a few paces and falling back to the ground, ass up. "This is terrible ice cream." He muttered into the sand.

Blue came up beside him, and turned him over, that same grim look of apology on his face. He said something then, and Clark groaned. "I can't hear you when you mumble. Speak up."

~~'I said, my semen has psychotropic properties, you need to stay put until it wears off.'~~

Clark shook his head wildly from side to side. “That’s crazy, why have you got weird semen? What other weird stuff are you hiding from me, huh?” He blew a raspberry. “You’re a weird guy, Bruce. You’re lucky I love you.”

~~'Just sleep, Clark, when you wake up, you'll feel better.'~~

“But I want ice cream.” He whined.

He knew the perfect ice cream shop and everything, he only hoped they were open. They should be, it was a Wednesday after all, but then again, Metropolis businesses often had strange work schedules, he wouldn’t put it past them being closed today.

He tried to fly to it, but when he went to move, he realised he couldn’t.

So instead, he promptly passed out.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, I hope this chapter was worth the wait (°ʖ°)

I know updates are getting less frequent, but lock down has ended here in England which means I'm back to full time work, and as such my motivation has taken a huge hit. I just ask that you are patient, and bare with me, I am trying <3

As always let me know your thoughts, I love your comments and they really are what keep me going. Take care, and catch you all next time <3

Chapter 23

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Clark looked around, all that he could see was a dark expanse.

He knew what expanse in specific. He'd dreamt of this place numerous times over the months.

Blue lounged across the edge of the brine pit, his tail dipping into the smokey water. His body was all but a silhouette, his face shrouded in shadows. Only his tail, with its many divots and scars could be seen, and from only that Clark knew it was him. 'Yøu're dreaming,' was all he said as Clark watched him.

Clark wanted to object to that; despite the location, it didn't feel like a dream. For one, most of the time he was down here he felt like a passive viewer, unable to do anything aside from watch. Right now though, he felt wholly in control, as though, if he wanted to, he could swim up and away from this place and find the blue sky above. As the minutes ticked on though, he looked down at his hands and as he stared, noticed the translucent appearance of his skin, and as he looked back up at Blue, he realised he too was not quite there either. In fact, the more he tried to look at his face, the more he realised it wasn't just blocked by the shadows, it wasn't there at all. 'Okay, that makes sense.' Clark said as he lowered his hands.

'Does it?' Blue asked, turning away from the pit entirely. From where he was standing, Clark could hardly see him anymore. It was as though with each moment, he was blending further and further into the darkness surrounding them. Clark found himself wanting to move closer, to try and see him. He didn't know why, but he needed to see him.

'Well, yeah,' Clark began, taking a few steps across the mussels and rocks surrounding the pool. 'For one, you're talking. You don't talk.'

With a swish of the tail, Blue swam out into the darkness. The movement caused the smokey water to ripple and despite not being able to see him anymore, Clark still heard his voice. 'I'm always talking, Clark. You just can't hear me. Not up there. Nøt without help.'

Clark tried to follow after him, opening his mouth to try and respond, but as he did, he felt something salty rush in. He tried to breathe, but found only water. He choked and coughed, clawing his way upwards through the water. He hoped Blue would come back to him. To save him. But he was long gone. In fact, the whole world was gone.

August 18th 2016

Clark jolted upright. He coughed until his throat felt like sandpaper, and even then he couldn't get rid of the feeling of water tickling his throat and his lungs. He rubbed his head, trying to ease the ache throbbing there.

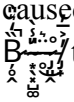
After looking blearily around, he realised what he must have choked on in his sleep. He was still on the beach and the rising tide meant the lapping water of the shore had finally reached him and his open mouth.

Judging by the sun, it was day, and had been for a few hours, which meant he had been out here all night. Clark tried to take stock of how exactly that would have even come to pass. There was just a lot going on here that he couldn't explain. For one, he was naked, two he felt like a humanised ball of fetit garbage and three his head throbbed despite the sun on his skin.

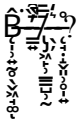
He tried to remember last night. He must have passed out on the beach after--

After what?

At the thought, his head pulsed and he groaned aloud. He rubbed his temples and despite the pain it caused, he tried to remember what had happened last night but beyond the vague memories of kissing there wasn't much else, and---



Wait.



He looked around for the mer in question and saw him swimming out in the water. Clark went to stand and after struggling to do so the first few times, he managed it after the fourth. He felt weak and overall exhausted, but all attempts to try and remember *why* that might be the case were greeted with a static like haze and unrelenting pain.

Upon seeing Clark awake, Blue began swimming towards him, and after reaching the shore, he scrambled across the sand. By the time he reached him, his concern was more than evident.

Clark also found at this moment that his legs were far weaker than he had first thought, so despite the effort it had taken to stand, he fell back into the sand in a heap. Blue came in closer then, his hands going for his face and stroking the skin of his cheeks. He was chirping and Clark only shook his head at the sound. He only had one thing on his mind and that was, "What happened last night?"

Blue's lips pressed into a thin line and after a moment, he brought his hand to his waist, right on top of the fine slit in his front. Then, he brought his finger to Clark’s mouth. Clark could taste the salt water on the digit, and somehow that was what caused a memory to rise from the murky cloud of his mind.

"We--" Clark stammered, his face growing warm. He brought his legs up to try and conserve some amount of modesty. "We did… The… *You know* ...."

They had kissed, that he knows for certain. He remembers Blue’s lips on him, before they traveled lower and then he, yes, he did *that* . Then, he must have reciprocated.

Yes, that he could remember.

But afterwards? Nothing.

If he pressed the thought, he could catch a glimmer of something else; the image of Blue, holding his hand on top of his stomach, his eyes wide with concern. Perhaps that memory was connected to his current ailment. Yes, if he ignored the ache in head for long enough, he knew somehow it was all connected.

He'd never heard of fellatio induced amnesia, though. Then again, there always was a first for everything and having heard far stranger and weirder stories, Clark decided to assume this was one such instance and go from there.

"Did you do something to me last night? I can't remember anything." Even his memories of the dream had faded. He knew he dreamt of the lake, but again, trying to examine it deeper only left him with that same grainy static he was somehow growing used to.

At the question, only what could be described as disappointment appeared on Blue's face. It stayed for a brief moment before being replaced with a grim stare, followed by a single nod.

"Okay…" Clark said, his mouth pressing into a thin line. "Did you do it on purpose, or was it an accident?" At the options, Blue made a face, so Clark continued. "Hold one finger up for the first option, two for the second."

Blue remained still.

Clark raised a brow. "Three for both," he added. "Four for neither."

Blue held up his hand, his thumb and pinkie curled inward.

"So, you meant to do it, *and* it was also an accident." Clark muttered to himself. He tried to put it all together, but his head was in worse shape than he thought and in the end, he gave up. At least for now. "You know what, we can figure this out later 'cause right now I need some coffee and a truck load of painkillers."

He managed to get up from the sand, with a few less stumbles this time, and once upright made his way towards his boat. After plugging in the coffee maker for what felt like the first time since he had been out here, and brewing himself a cup of definitely expired coffee, he made his way towards the cabin to deal with the second of his steps. Given his recent trip to Cottonwood, he wasn't lacking in medication and after swallowing a few pills down, he reclined across his bed and sipped at his coffee.

It was as he lay there that Blue made his own way indoors, slowly sidling his way across the floor before coming up beside the bed. He brought his arms up to the edge of the mattress, folding them over and resting his head on them. He watched Clark closely, and even as Clark set his cup down and closed his eyes, he remained where he was, watching him.

He didn't intend to sleep, he only meant to rest his eyes, but given how poorly he slept he wasn't exactly surprised that he did fall asleep. It must have only been for an hour or so, as the room was still bright when he cracked open his eyes. He also noticed Blue hadn't moved from the position Clark had last seen him. His eyes were closed too, though the moment Clark sat upright, he gave a quiet chirp and raised his head, blinking up at Clark sleepily.

"Hey." Clark said, bringing a hand out and resting it on top of Blue's head. "You feeling okay?" He asked.

Blue thought for a moment, before nodding. He then pointed at Clark and tilted his head.

"Me? Yeah, I'm good. I'm a lot better now, actually." He rubbed his face and sighed. There was still an ache there, but it had lessened considerably. "I don't know what you did, but it definitely did a number on me..." He muttered.

It wasn't exactly Kryptonite levels of disorientation and pain, but the fact that whatever Blue had done left a crater like hole in his memory, was a concern. Also the pain. That was what truly unsettled him. Usually sunlight was all he ever needed to be rid of it, but considering he was sleeping out on the beach, in the nude no less, and still felt an ache pulse throughout himself meant that whatever Blue had done was nothing short of unprecedented.

With that thought, Clark got up from the bed and went to grab his journal from his desk. Aside from using it to make a quick note of each day as it passed, he barely used it anymore. Now however, he had a reason to write in it, so he flipped it open to a blank page and after making a note of the date he made his way back towards the bed.

He made a note of what he already knew. He and Blue had, for the sake of brevity, sucked off one another and whatever Blue had done after that had left him like this. The question was, what exactly that thing was.

After finishing his notes he eyed Blue. "So, after we did… *that*... what did you do exactly?"

Blue chirped at Clark, using his hands to gesture between the two of them as well as their respective bodies. Clark took it all in before pressing his lips into a fine line. “Blue, can you do that all again, but a *lot* slower.”

Blue made a face that looked suspiciously like a smile, and he repeated his gestures; slowly this time. It was still a whole lot of inexplicable hand movements, waving of the hand near the head, touching his forehead then Clark’s and then the rubbing of his stomach. It was only after he was finished, with Clark’s face still rife with confusion, that he brought his hand to his front, and with what looked like slight reluctance and embarrassment, he spread the slit there open.

Clark’s eyes blew wide, but he didn't try to stop him. Curiosity won out and as Blue spread open the slit, Clark saw something pink peeking out from within. "That's your…" he trailed off, his mouth suddenly too dry to continue.

With a shy nod, Blue used his other hand to press his finger into the slit. He wiggled it from side to side and as he did he made a quiet purr, the sound of which caused Clark’s own cock to stir. He brought his legs up once more as he continued to watch Blue touch himself.

It was strangely intimate. Despite Clark doing nothing more than stare, it felt as though that alone had a presence. As if with each pass of his eyes he could feel the contours of Blue’s body as though it were his hands touching him. It felt familiar, perhaps because they had done this very thing only yesterday, only this time around Clark hoped to remember it.

After a few more presses of his finger, his cock came out of its sheath. It was even pinker outside of the body, and Clark was surprised by how much it moved; curling around Blue’s arm and beginning to pulse. He couldn’t help it, he moved closer, his hand nearing the wriggling appendage. “Can I?” He asked.

Blue’s face was thoroughly red at this point, and with shallow breaths and half lidded eyes, he nodded. Clark brought his hand out and took Blue’s cock. Almost immediately, it moved from Blue’s hand to his own, resuming that same pulsing motion it had done, only this time Clark could feel the full extent of the pressure from it against his forearm.

He tightened his grip by a fraction and Blue’s hands scrambled for his shoulders as he seemed to lose his balance. Clark found himself smiling at that, and he began to tighten then loosen his grip more. “That feel good?” He muttered.

Blue nodded frantically, chirping as he brought his mouth to Clark's. He grinned through the kisses and found the more he moved his hand the more Blue's kisses grew harsher; he began to bare his teeth and crush his mouth against Clark's with a primal tenacity. The claws on his shoulders also curled inward, and Clark was well aware that if he were human, they'd be *in* him. As it stood though, it only severed to spur him on and brought his other hand to Blue's cock, taking the head of it and tickling the tip of it just as Blue had done to himself earlier.

Blue pulled back with a scream. Yet despite the pain the sound caused in his skull, Clark found himself smiling, taking in Blue's thoroughly debauched appearance and savouring every scrap of it.

After a few shuddery breaths, Blue pulled away from Clark and fell back against the bed. His eyes were closed and Clark watched his chest rise and fall with each deep breath he took. Clark also noticed it wasn't just his face that was flushed pink; the whole of his chest and stomach had taken on that same rosy hue.

He also watched Blue's cock retract back into his body with both equal parts fascination and bewilderment.

Then after a minute, it was gone, and Blue looked as he always did.

Clark however still held the evidence of what they had done.

He looked down at the puddle of semen in his palm and had to do a double take. It didn't look like any semen Clark had ever seen before. It was completely black in colour and the way it moved in Clark's hand when he titled it was reminiscent of glue. He brought his other hand up to poke at it, and upon contact he found it also felt like glue, sticking to his finger in a long tendril as he tried to pull his finger away.

He looked at the small amount gathered on his index finger and despite thinking it was probably a bad idea, he still did it.

He brought it to his lips and swiped his tongue across the surface.

Clark's eyes blew wide as he tried to come to terms with what he was experiencing.

It tasted amazing.

Even more than amazing even; it tasted like nectar, only sweeter. Clark brought his finger back to the puddle in his palm, and had another taste.

It was upon his third such taste that he looked up and found Blue's wide eyes on him.

"Uh." Clark brought his hand down and wiped it against the bedding. "Was that a bad idea?"

Blue didn't bother responding to that question and instead chose to frantically tap on the journal beside Clark.

"Right!" Clark blurted as grabbed both the book and pen and began to write. After he finished he reread the words and turned to Blue. "Okay, I wrote it down."

Blue however, looked less than impressed as he looked down at the page.

"Hey, I'm sorry, I don't exactly know what to write other than '*Blue has weird cum* .'" Clark muttered. Blue only tapped on the book again.

"You--" Clark made a face. "You want me to write that down?"

A nod.

"Because you have weird cum?"

Another nod.

"Alright…" Clark muttered as he went about writing it down. His hand moved across the page, although he found near the end of the sentence that the words began to jumble into one large mass in his vision.

“Oh.” Clark let out as he tried to read the words and found he couldn’t. “I think I’m remembering why that was a bad idea.”

His vision began to swim, and yet despite it all he let out a laugh as he fell back against the bed. He felt weighless, as though at any moment he’d start floating. He lay there on the mattress and moved his arms across the bedding. For some reason, it felt so soft on his skin and he closed his eyes to savour it. “I feel good...” He let out with a breathy sigh.

'That's because you ingested a smaller portion this time.'

Clark nodded at that, as he took a deep breath. “Yeah… I think I remember. Last time you were down my throat. I had it all. It made my belly all warm.”

Blue looked away, his face pink. 'Yes, well, you took me by surprise.' He turned back to Clark tilting his head to the side as he thought. ‘I felt... good. I wasn't able to control myself.'

“Yeah…” Clark said breezily as he looked at Blue. “Sorry about that.”

'Don't be. In fact, I should be the one apologizing.' Blue said, shaking his head. 'But I won't lie and say I didn't intend for you to have *any*, I just didn't mean for you to ingest all of it.'

“Right…” Clark nodded. “Hence why it was an accident *and* on purpose.”

'Exactly.'

“And is this why you wanted me to try it?” Clark asked, waving his hand languidly between the two of them. “So we could talk?”

'Yes, and it has worked. But it's not a permanent solution, sadly.' Blue brought his hand out and took Clark's, he rubbed the pad of his thumb across the skin there and in that moment Clark could hardly think of anything other than how good Blue's skin felt on him. He wanted to feel more of it. He wanted all of him.

After staring at his thumb for far longer than was necessary, Clark raised a brow. "How come? I can just have a little more… *you know* ." He wiggled his brows, and at Blue's expression, he fell into a fit of giggles. "Then we can talk all the time!"

'Right, but then we are back in the same situation we were in this morning'

Clark frowned. "What do you mean?"

'By that I mean, you won't remember this. Hence why I wanted you to write everything down, but given how out of it you are, I doubt anything you wrote would be of use.'

"Uh, excuse *you*." Clark said haughty as he sat up and picked the journal up from his side. He opened it back up and brought his pen to the surface. "I don't know about *you*, I'm a journalist, I can write anytime, anywhere. No matter what. And my memory is great, I'm gonna remember all of this, just you watch."

Blue made a face. 'It's not that great.'

"Try me." Clark said, his hand already going about writing down what he had already been told. He felt like Shakespeare, as though with each pass of his pen he was crafting only the finest of sonnets. He filled a whole page and flipped over to the next one, eyeing Blue with a sly grin as he wrote. "See? I'm not as dumb as you think."

'Intelligence has nothing to do with it.'// Blue said softly. 'It's all about tenacity. Hence why you're currently awake and cognizant where as any human would be dead.'

Clark made a face, his eyes narrowing. "Wait. How do you know i'm not human?"

Blue rolled his eyes. 'Clark, please don't insult my intelligence by implying that I ever thought you were human.'

Clark however, only grew more petulant, he let his journal fall to the side once more as he crossed his arms. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m a human. I came out of my Ma and everything.”

Perhaps sensing the losing battle before him, Blue pressed his lips together. 'Okay. You're human.'

“Damn straight.” Clark nodded. With that now asserted, whatever energy he must have used to write was now gone and he fell to the bed with a thump. “Though out of curiosity; if I wasn’t a human, why would that mean I won’t remember any of this?”

Blue looked less than impressed, but still deigned to answer Clark’s question. 'You don't have a syreni.'

“What's a ‘syreni’?”

Blue made a face. 'How well do you know the brain?'

A blank stare was Clark’s response.

At that, Blue only let out a sigh. 'A syreni is the mer equivalent of an amygdala. Mers and mernans have syrenic and human, and evidently your species, have amygdalae. They're different in the way they process extra sensory information. A syreni can produce and receive this information, whereas an amygdala can't. The reason mer semen allows us to communicate is because the psychotropic properties it contains stimulate your amygdala to the point where it begins to act like a syreni, but the stimulation comes at a cost. For a human, it would mean brain death, but not for you. In your case the stimulation only exhausts your amygdala, leaving it unable to transfer the information it receives out to the rest of the brain, Meaning you can't store memories, whilst in this state.'

After hearing the words, Clark's frown only grew. "That sucks."

Blue nodded his agreement. "My hope was that by only consuming a small amount of my semen, we'd be able to communicate and you'd be able to remember doing so, but I'm now doubting that it's even possible. A full dose knocked you out in less than a minute, and a fraction of it has you like this." To illustrate his point, Blue brought his hand out and lifted Clark's own up, he dropped it and it fell to the mattress with a dull thud.

Clark tried to lift it up himself, but found that he was unable to. He didn't feel panicked by this revelation though, he only laughed. "I can't move."

Blue's expression grew pained. "It's the amygdala. It can only handle so much before it becomes overwhelmed."

"What happens when it gets overwhelmed?" Clark asked, his vision growing cloudy.

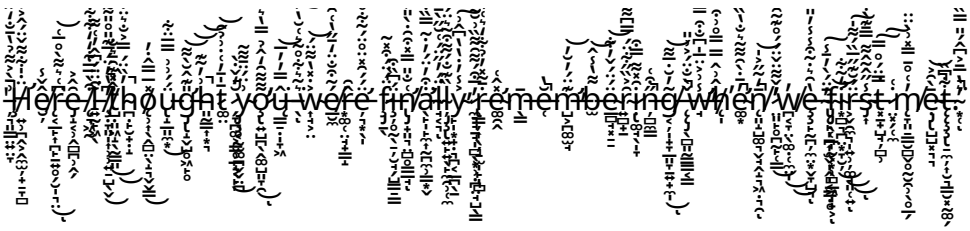
"You fall unconscious."

"No." Clark let out, though the word was slightly slurred. He managed to shake his head from side to the side, but in doing so began to feel dizzy. "I don't wanna go to sleep. I wanna keep talking to you. Don't let me fall asleep, Bruce."

Blue smiled at that. "It's okay, Clark. We will figure something out." He took his hand once more and squeezed it gently. Even as the whole room began to grow dark, Clark could still make out Blue, though he began to grow distant, as though there were whole oceans now between them.

"We could always do what we did before." He heard Blue say.

"Before?" Clark managed to choke out.

Blue laughed. 

A lone eel in the water. Black eyes in the darkness. Sharp teeth snapping shut.

Clark’s eyes blew wide. He opened his mouth, trying to force out a response. He felt his mind grow alive with the emergence of a half formed memory, but just as soon as he thought he had it in his grasp, it was gone. He closed his eyes, and not even a moment later, he was asleep.

It was dark by the time Clark awoke. As he slowly sat up, his head pulsed. He groaned as he brought his hands up to rub the area that throbbed. “God damn it…” he muttered.

At the sound, he heard what must have been Blue stirring. He must have been asleep in the tub, and after the splashing of water graced Clark’s ears, he felt something damp touch his thigh. He cracked his eyes open and looked at Blue. “Okay… What the *fuck* happened?”

Blue’s expression grew pained, and rather than try to communicate as he usually did with hand gestures or chirps, he instead reached for Clark’s journal and passed it over to him. Clark looked down at the book and found even the word that he knew said ‘journal’ on the front, looked like a squiggle. He shook his head. “I can’t read anything right now. My head feels like it’s in a vice.”

His first thought was sun, but as he looked out towards the dark sky he realised that wasn’t an option.

His second thought was painkillers and as he turned his head and saw the packet already on his bedside cabinet, with an empty coffee cup beside it, he frowned. Did he already take some? Why couldn’t he remember doing it? Why couldn’t he remember anything?

“Alright, I'm gonna go do something real quick.” He grumbled as he hobbled off the bed. “Don’t follow me.”

He stumbled out of the cabin and closed the door behind him. He peeked through the wall and found Blue had indeed not tried to follow him. Secure in the knowledge he wouldn't be seen, he made his way across the beach and looked up to the sky. It was night time, sure, but only on this half of the planet.

He flew up into the sky, and after fighting back the wave of nausea that came with it, he made his way east, and despite the fact that he was fairly certain he blacked out at certain points of the flight, he managed to keep himself airborne.

The further he went, the more the colour of the sky shifted; turning from a deep blue to a faint purple to a wash of pink. Not long after that, he felt the first streaks of sunlight brush against his skin, and almost immediately he felt better.

That's not to say he felt normal. God no. He still felt like 'death warmed over', but at least he wasn't just 'death' anymore.

He remained static in the sky for a while longer but even as the minutes ticked by and more of the sun graced his skin, he still felt off. Whatever had happened the day before, had done a number on him, and he needed to try and figure out what exactly that was.

If Blue's gesturing was anything to go by, his journal hopefully held those answers.

After a few more minutes in the sun, he flew back home, making sure to fly in the stratosphere this time. The last thing he needed were photos of himself flying naked across the sky plastered in every newspaper.

Upon his return, he made his way back inside. Blue was still where he had left him, and upon falling back onto the bed, he was handed the journal once more. The ache in his head was still there but now he was actually able to read the word on the front.

He opened the journal and found the most recent entry;

August 18th 2016

Blue and I sucked each other off last night. Woke up next morning not being able to remember anything. Don't eat his cum. Seriously. Blue has weird cu m

I men it . don't eat it no t e ve n fo r curiosu frys ske serious ly clar i kno u caus i am u bus dunt do et agun, i kno u anna remebs wha hupponz but uz cant. I will wrut don wot i cun so jus tsust me. u kno blu ral nam it brooze bt ur braiz iz difurnt so hs kan tulk but onlee whe u eat coom but if u eat u furgot but thur is a way butt u hv to go down agayn like bufoor u rembrur lake? Lake go go with blyu and u kno nam. thing not bad. moomoory is fuzz but coms back sumtims when u slleps cuz brain work buttr then. god i doonu wht else to writz but plz just rty tol remoobers plz

anasfsd jkfh dkjdfklkj jsoiww mskdjakdmnc ncuhjiem asisjk nw wnz xkjkljdsy jshdiuyem sljofdjajdnf jhdfhbadfnb jbnfn njkncm kjhkdjf kj naklsdj ail dj flkJSDR FKJADKV JAHSDF HASDKJF KDJSF JKAD SNF aghasdg sahdjasd q q q wd a d c kfdlsfk lk asd bu

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"What the actual fuck..." Clark muttered as he stared down at the scrawl on the pages. It started out okay, but as the writing progressed it became illegible to the point it looked as though an actual infant had written it. Clark couldn't make out anything other than the first few words and so it was with a tight frown that he turned to Blue. "I take it you had something to do with this?"

He held the book out and Blue leaned forward and his eyes scanned over the page. He grimaced at what he saw, and after making a noise that sounded suspiciously like a groan of disappointment, he tapped at the words 'weird cum.'

"You have weird cum." Clark said, looking at Blue through narrowed eyes.

Blue nodded.

"Your cum is the reason I feel like I've been hit by a freight train?"

Another nod.

“Wonderful.” Clark said as he slammed the book shut and threw it to the side. “Well, I guess I'm never giving you head again.”

Blue looked somewhat perturbed by this, and at the expression Clark found his resolve crumble. “Don’t get me wrong, we will still have sex, but if your cum makes me feel like I want to die every time I eat it, I am not putting your dick anywhere near my mouth ever again.”

He could tell Blue didn’t agree with the sentiment, but he didn’t care. His mind was a mess right now and even after his stint in the sun he still felt like crap. He reached for the painkillers and popped two out, swallowing them dry before falling back against the bed. “I’m gonna sleep, we can talk more in the morning, okay?”

Blue made a quiet chirp and brushed his hand against Clark’s cheek. Despite how much it pained him to do so, Clark cracked open his eyes and sent a waning smile towards him. “I'm not mad at you, i'm just really tired. Tomorrow i’ll feel better and we can talk more.”

Blue made another sound and this time tapped his hand against the mattress, raising a brow. Clark sighed, but still moved aside. “Alright, but if I drool on, that's your problem.”

After pushing himself up onto it, he curled up close to Clark. After using the last of his strength to pull the blanket up over them, Clark brought his head in close to Blue’s neck and took a deep breath. “Goodnight, Blue…” he mumbled as he felt sleep wash over him.

Chapter End Notes

We are now over 100k words!

Also soz about the near month between updates, but as I said, I'm back at full time work, and my motivation is in the crapper rn. I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, despite the wait. There is a lot going on in it for one, I hope you enjoy analyzing and absorbing every little detail I've thrown in there for you ;)

As always if you enjoyed this chapter, lemme know, and I will catch you all next time! <3

Chapter 24

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 19th 2016

Thankfully, when Clark woke up this time, he didn't want to immediately crawl into a hole and die. He felt somewhat normal, if a little achy, and that was more than enough for him. The pain was gone and so it was with a sigh of relief that he tried to sit up.

Key word: tried. Upon moving, he quickly found he wouldn't be getting far. One look to the side revealed why. Blue was still asleep beside him, his body on top of Clark's left arm, anchoring him in place. As subtly as he could manage, Clark tried to pull it free, but his attempts were met with a low grumble that told Clark that Blue was indeed awake, but that he didn't want to be moved by something as trivial as Clark needing his arm.

So he lay there for a little while longer, turning to his side and bringing his other arm up and over Blue's waist. He let his mind wander as he waited for Blue to deign the world ready for his presence, but as the minutes ticked by, Clark found his earlier patience wearing thin.

"Blue." Clark said, using his hand to poke the mer in the ribs. "Come on now, I gotta get up."

Another grumble was Blue's response.

"I mean it, I got shit to do and I can't do it with you on my arm."

Blue only turned his face further into the pillow.

So Clark did what any other person would do in this situation.

“Alright.” He took a deep breath. “You asked for it.”

He trailed his hand higher and wedged it underneath the mer’s armpit. Once there, he wiggled his fingers to and fro and the effect was almost immediate. Blue screeched, rocketing up in bed and whirling on Clark with fiery eyes.

Clark ignored the look. Instead he took his now free hand and made a point of rubbing the circulation back into it with a smirk. “Oh, sorry. Did I wake you?”

Blue opened his mouth, presumably to screech some more, but in the end, chose to fall back against the bed with a grumble instead. Clark brought his hand to the back of the mer’s head, rubbing down the tufts of hair there as best he could. “You know, I would have thought you’d have learnt your lesson last time, but apparently not.”

At the words, Blue let out a long whine and burrowed his head into the pillow, to which Clark only laughed. “Don’t worry, that was the end of the tickle punishment. You can go back to sleep.” Clark yawned as he stretched his arms out. “I got other shit to do.”

Which was an understatement and a half. He had been letting things slip around here and he had to do a lot of things today in order to try and rectify that. He couldn’t exactly get mad at himself, though. He used to somehow let whole weeks go by without taking care of himself or the island. Nowadays, that was becoming a rarity, and today it was only occurring due to him having spent the past two days in a haze due to semen related memory loss.

He got up from bed and dressed himself. He then took all the dirty clothes from the hamper and loaded them into a bag before taking them out onto the boat. He then took the mers tub and dumped the stagnant water out into the ocean before putting the now empty tub back under the bed. He then spent some time sweeping the floor, ridding the place of its ever present dusting of sand-- for a few hours at least. He then scrubbed the cooker, went through his cupboards and made a list of groceries he needed to pick up in town and after a few more odd jobs, not limited to watering his flowers and crops, the final thing he needed to do was deal with were his bed sheets.

He hadn’t changed them in a while, and now he had a definite incentive to. As he had been cleaning around the cabin he had spotted the strange stain on the fabric, right beside where Blue lay, inky black in colour. Despite having no real memory of what had happened to cause it, he had a feeling in his gut about what the stain could possibly be, and if it were indeed correct, he’d *definitely* need to wash his sheets.

Blue however was still curling into the bedding, and despite Clark cleaning everything else before coming to the bed once more, Blue still hadn't moved by the time he had finished up. He sat on the edge of the mattress, resting his hand on the mer's hip and rocked him slightly. "Come on Blue, don't you wanna get up? Go for a swim?"

Blue let out a long whine at that, and only moved from side to side.

Clark frowned, letting out a sigh. "Is that a yes or a no?"

One chirp.

"Yes?"

Another single chirp.

"Okay..." Clark said slowly as he watched Blue continue to not move. "So… are you going to move *or* ?"

Blue's response was to turn his head and look at Clark though one cracked open eye, he wiggled his hips slightly and gave another chirp. "You want me to carry you?" Clark ventured.

He nodded.

"Alright." Clark said with a roll of the eyes. "What his majesty wants, his majesty gets…" He stood up and scooped Blue into his arms, rolling him onto his front in the process. Blue still looked sleepy, but that did change by the time Clark walked out onto the beach and set him down in the water. After rolling around the lapping waves, he already looked more awake. He then brought his mouth to the surface of the water, and after a moment, turned to Clark and squirted some at him.

Clark smiled at that, using his foot to splash some water back at Blue. “Alright, you be good out here, alright? I'm gonna change the sheets.”

Blue nodded before diving back down and this time swimming further out. Clark turned back towards his cabin and walked inside.

With Blue no longer obstructing him, he pulled the sheets free from the bed with ease. As he did, he eyed the stain there once more.

‘Don’t eat his cum. Seriously. Blue has weird cum.’

Clark’s own words rang through his mind, and yet, he couldn’t help his curiosity. He brought the sheets up to his nose and took a deep breath.

It smelt like semen and salt water.

Clark felt his cock twitch.

He took another breath.

It was intoxicating; the scent. Perhaps it was the familiarity of it, the fact that if he truly focused, somehow, he could *feel* what had occurred to cause it. Yet, for all intents and purposes, it truly was foreign to him. *This is Blue’s cum,* his mind provided, *he came and you don’t even remember it.*

“I want to...” He muttered to himself. “I really want to...” He pressed the sheet even closer to himself, hoping that if he did it for long enough, the scent would somehow permeate his mind and dredge up what must have been hidden there.

Yet, despite his wish, nothing managed to pierce through the wall of blubber that was Clark’s memory of the past few days. All he had to go on was his diary entry, which, honestly, was just as bad as having nothing. At least with nothing he could live in quiet ignorance. *With* the diary however, all he could do was ponder the meaning of his deranged sentences. What was he trying to tell himself? He just couldn’t say.

He realised there was no real point in dwelling on it. Somehow he knew that no amount of thinking or wishing would change the fact he had no memory of what had happened between him and Blue the past few nights. So he instead chose to focus on what he *could* do something about.

With that thought in mind, he grabbed the spare set of sheets from his dresser and redressed the bed. He then grabbed the bundle of dirty sheets and carried them to his boat and set them inside the bag with his dirty clothes. He then gave his boat a once over to make sure it too was in working order; he needed some fuel, but that could be handled along with everything else at Cottonwood.

He was ready to leave, and so he stepped back onto the dock to try and find Blue. He spotted him terrorizing a school of fish nearby. “Hey!” He called out.

Blue stopped in the water almost immediately and swam the short distance back towards land before poking his head out. He tilted it to the side and chirped up to Clark, who in turn, crouched down and pressed a kiss on his forehead. “I’m going now. Stay safe, okay?”

Blue nodded, and pointed at Clark, before chirping. Clark nodded. “Yeah, yeah, I'll be safe too.”

Satisfied with that, Blue dove down once more and returned to where the school of fish had been. They however, were long gone, and Clark could see the frown on Blue’s face as a result from here.

Clark jumped back onto the boat, and headed to the wheel to start the engine. He then made his way over to Cottonwood, and aside from a short bout of choppy water, he didn’t face any issues, mer related or otherwise.

After stepping off the boat, he made his way first to Ole Sal’s, hoping to pick up some fuel for his boat as well as catch up with Marcos. Upon getting there though, he found the shutters down, as well as a note on them that simply read ‘closed until further notice.’

He debated leaving it at that. Lucy sold fuel so it wasn’t as if he *had* to buy it from here, and as for talking to Marcos, there was always another day. And yet, he could also hear a certain someone’s heart beat emanating from above the store, and he didn’t exactly sound busy.

He made his way down the alley beside the shop to the back of the building. After stepping out from the cramped alley, he found himself in the garage's marina. There were a few boats here, most looking more than a little worse for wear, but Clark wasn't interested in them. He instead looked around the place, and once he was sure there was no one around, he flew up towards one of the second story windows and peered through.

He spotted Marcos inside on his bed, playing the console Clark had given him. He wondered if Marcos would spot him, but as the seconds ticked by and he hadn't, Clark instead chose to knock on the glass.

Marcos jolted at the sound and dropped the console onto his bed as a result. He whirled to the window, but upon seeing Clark, let out a breath as he stood up and approached it. "Jesus..." He let out as he opened the window and stepped aside. "Give me a heart attack, why don't you?"

"Sorry," Clark said as he slid in through the gap. It was a tight fit, but with the ability to float on his side, he just about managed it. Once inside though, he was confronted with a room so messy that Clark had to brush the clothes underfoot aside before landing. "So," Clark said, raising a brow towards Marcos. "This place looks great."

"Hey." Marcos said, crossing his arms. "I didn't come to *your* place and trash talk it."

Clark raised his brows at that. "I appreciate that, but what I'm saying is--" He reached down and picked up one of the shirts there, waving it for emphasis. "Would it kill you to use a hamper?"

"You sound like my dad…" Marcos huffed.

"Yeah, well, that's 'cause we're talking sense." He muttered, dropping the shirt and making his way towards the bedside cabinet. On top of it there were a number of books and video game cases, as well as a mug that upon further inspection, was filled with a furry green substance. Clark grimaced as he turned back towards Marcos.

"I know, I know..." Marcos said with a wave of the hand as he fell back against the mattress. "It's just, I'm reopening the store tomorrow, and I wanted to get the most out of all this free time as I could. Things like bathing and cleaning have sort of fallen to the wayside."

Clark opened his mouth to dispute him; for one thing, this mess looked like an ongoing thing, and not the result of a few days of reckless abandon. He however chose to concede and instead said, “right... But come tomorrow, when you’re busy with the store again, when are you gonna have time to clean this place?”

“Uh.” Marcos uttered, before turning his head by a fraction towards Clark and offering a meek smile. “I didn't think of that.”

“Uh huh.” Clark said with a roll of the eyes. “Look, this place is a shit hole, but it’s not like it will take you *hours* to change that. Just throw this shit--” he said, prodding the clothes on the floor with his feet. “In the washer, change your sheets, take a shower and neaten the place up. *Then* you can spend the rest of the day playing video games. You know, as a reward.”

“That does make sense…” Marcos said thoughtfully, though he didn’t actually attempt to move.

Clark pursed his lips at the sight. “Or you could just keep putting it off ad infinitum. What do I know? Not like I'm the adult here or anything.”

Marcos pouted. “Hey, we’re *both* adults...”

“Yet only one of us is in our underwear playing video games beside a cup of God knows what.” Clark grimaced at the cup once more. “Seriously, what is that?”

“I think it was soup..." Marcos offered, sitting up to lean over and examine the inside of it as Clark had done. “I just sort of keep it up here ‘cause I don't know how to clean it.”

Clark shivered at the thought. “Okay, so throw that thing in the dumpster and clean everything else.” He clapped his hands together, hoping the sound would do something, but it didn’t, and Marcos remained where he laid. “Come on now, hop to it.”

“I just…” he turned away from Clark then. “I just don’t feel like it, okay?” Despite not seeing his face, Clark didn’t need to if the way Marcos curled in on himself was anything to go by.

Now *that,* Clark could definitely sympathise with. He heaved a sigh and approached the bed. He sat down on the edge and brought his hand to Marcos' calf, resting it there. "Now why is that?"

"I still haven't told my dad about the money..." Marcos said, so quietly it was almost a whisper. "It's just sitting there in my account, and it's like, every time I try to think about *how* I would tell him, I just freeze and it makes me feel all--" he waved his hand by his stomach. "He's already got so much on his plate, and after how he spoke to you, what he *thinks* about you, I don't even know what telling him about you giving us this money would do." Marcos let out a shuddery breath. "He's too proud to accept charity, especially from a merner."

"I get that..." Clark offered, bringing his hands to his lap and clasping them together. "It's gonna be a difficult conversation, sure, but you have to have it. For one, I can imagine the stress he's going through thinking that you're still struggling for money is doing more harm than anything else."

Marcos stiffened at that, turning his face into the pillow and groaning. "I didn't even think about that…"

"Look, I don't know much about your dad. Well, aside from the fact that he hates me, but I know one thing, and that is that he cares about *you* ." He brought his hand back towards Marcos and set it on his side. "Tell him whatever you want; say you won the lottery, say that some rich fisherman came in and brought one of your boats for a crazy amount, I don't care. At the end of the day, I didn't do this to get in your dad's good books. I did it because I don't want you to have to stress over something as trivial as money whilst your dad's sick."

"Really?" Marcos said, sitting up and looking at Clark. "You sure you don't mind?"

"I told you, I'm doing this for *you* ."

Marcos leant forward then, and it took Clark a moment to realise what exactly he was doing. He set his head on Clark's shoulder, and Clark didn't miss the sound of sniffling. "Thanks, Clark… Seriously."

"Don't mention it." Clark said, leaning his own head against Marcos'.

Eventually, Marcos stood and took a deep breath. “Okay.” He said, turning to Clark with a resolute nod. “I’m gonna go to Redding.”

“Oh?” Clark said, raising a brow. “What happened to cleaning your room?”

“Eh, I’ll do that later.” Marcos said, with a wave of the hand that told Clark that this room was going to remain like this for a few more days at least. “All I know is I wanna talk to my dad right now, and doing it in person is way better than over the phone.”

“Fair enough.” Clark said, standing up as well. “I would say to send him my regards, but…”

Marcos huffed at that, offering a faint smile. “Maybe next time?”

At that, Clark stepped outside of Marcos’ room as he got himself dressed. Clark wasn’t at a loss with what to do though; the corridor was lined with photos of Marcos and his father as well as a woman who Clark had to assume was his mother. In the photo he saw, she stood beside Salvator wearing a wedding gown. It was frumpy looking thing that covered her from her neck to her feet, yet, didn’t detract from her beauty one bit. Beside the wedding photo, there was another of her holding a small bundle of cloth, a small hand poked out from within it, and Clark had to assume that small hand, was Marcos’.

That was confirmed when Marcos left his room and saw Clark looking at the photographs. He stepped up beside him and pointed at the photo in question. “That’s me and my mama.” Marcos murmured as he took a breath and let his hand trail down the side of the frame. “It’s the only photo we have together.”

Clark felt a pang of sadness at that. “She looks beautiful.” He offered.

“Yeah.” Marcos smiled. “My dad said everyone around town thought she was the prettiest person here. They couldn’t understand why she was with a guy like him, but it’s like I told you, you can’t help who you fall in love with, and my mama fell in love with my dad.”

Clark only nodded and continued down the corridor, taking in the other pictures. Some were of Marcos on a bike, others of him holding a fishing pole, but the last one showed him in the very marina Clark saw earlier, his hand on an old boat Clark realised he recognised. “Wow.” He said with a small laugh. “Didn’t realise your boat was *quiet* so old.”

“Oh yeah, it was my grandpa’s, then it became my dads, then mine.” He smiled. “Sort of like a family heirloom.”

Clark smiled back. “That’s nice.” Clark tried to think of his family's heirloom and realised it was right there with them. He held his wrist up, looking at the watch there. The face was cracked, with arms that hadn’t moved in a long while, but Clark still wore it nevertheless. “This watch was my grandfather's, then my dad gave it to me when I was fifteen.” He showed it to Marcos, who’s eyebrows furrowed upon taking it in.

“It looks, uh…” he eyed Clark. “Interesting.”

Clark couldn’t say much to that, he knew it looked less than impressive, but there was a reason why that was, and surprisingly, Clark found it didn’t feel too difficult to mention. “It broke the day Metropolis fell.” He eyed the hands, frozen in time. “When I was getting changed into my suit, I threw all my clothes into the apartment and then--” he paused to think, trying to remember what had happened that day. It was a blur, but he was able to piece parts of it together. “I must have gone back for it, along with some other stuff. But yeah, it broke, and it hasn't worked since.”

“Oh.” Marcos let out, his eyes blowing wide. “Shit, i’m--”

Clark held up his hand at that, and actually found himself smiling. “No harm done. I know what you mean. It doesn't exactly *look* the best. I probably should get around to fixing it. It’s been long enough.”

Marcos offered a meek smile. “I think that’s a good idea.”

They headed downstairs, and as Marcos was making his way out the back, given the shutters were still down, Clark was reminded as to what he had come here for in the first place. “Any chance I can get some fuel while I'm here?”

“Oh, sure.” Marcos said. “You got some jerry cans with you, or you gonna need some new ones?”

Clark thought of the empty cans on his boat. Could he be bothered to go grab them? No, he quickly realised. “Yeah, I'll take a couple.”

Marcos grabbed some, and after filling them at the pump in the marina, he handed them over to Clark. Upon trying to pull some money out of his wallet, Marcos only looked on in bewilderment. “You’re kidding, right? You’ve got over two hundred grand of store credit.”

Clark however still took out the wad of notes and held them out. “Consider this a reward for getting out of bed today.”

Marcos looked unconvinced at first, but slowly a sly grin spread across his features and he took the money and slid it into his pocket. “Hey, if you wanna incentivise me to get out of bed with money, that’s fine by me.”

“I figured." Clark said with a roll of the eyes, but he too couldn’t help but smile. “Thanks Marcos, are you heading to the docks or are you taking one of these boys to Redding?” With his hands occupied carrying the cans, he used his head to gesture towards the boats in the marina.

Marcos shivered. “Oh God, no. These are, um, let's just say they’re not as seaworthy as my dad likes to have customers believe.”

“Good, ole Sal.” Clark huffed.

Marcos laughed at that and Clark joined him on his walk towards the docks. He figured it would be smart to drop the cans off before trying to buy any groceries, and besides, he still had to go grab his laundry.

After leaving the alley way and walking the short distance to the dock, Marcos paused, turning a shy smile to him. “You know, Sal’s not actually my dad's name.”

“Wait, what?” Clark let out an incredulous laugh at that, and when Marcos didn’t return it, his face grew serious. “Seriously?”

“It's his middle name. My grandfather was the original Salvator, and when my dad was a kid everyone just sort of called him Sal jr, then when my grandfather passed, he became just Sal. It just sort of stuck. He never bothers to tell people otherwise anymore.”

“Huh.” Clark said, his mind still occupied with trying to imagine the old grouch of a man he knew as anything other than, well, that. He understood that fundamentally the man he knew couldn’t have always been old and grouchy but trying to imagine him as a child only resulted in the image of Sal’s face on the body of an infant, and that image alone was enough to make Clark shiver. “So what is his first name?” He asked.

“Alberto.” Marcos said, stopping by his boat.

“Alberto.” Clark repeated, letting the word roll over his tongue. After hearing it, he found himself shaking his head. “Yeah, not gonna lie, I see him as more of a Salvator.”

Marcos only shrugged a shoulder at that. “You and everyone else on the island. To be honest, I think he kind of prefers it that way.” Marcos leant against his boat, a wistful smile washing over his features. “My mama was the only one aside from family to ever call him Alberto.”

Clark smiled at that thought. “What do you call him?” He ended up asking.

“Dad.” Marcos said with a laugh. “I think if I called him anything other than that, I'd never hear the end of it.”

“Fair enough.” Clark laughed back. He knew what he meant. As a teen, he found calling his folks anything other than Ma or Pa often led to a stern look that told Clark to amend his words, or face the consequences. “Well, it was good seeing you, Marcos. Take care.”

Marcos hopped onto his boat, and after a wave towards Clark and a quick goodbye, he was off.

Clark emptied the fuel into his boat and after placing the now empty cans into the closet, he picked up his laundry and was off.

On this occasion, he didn't feel the need to sit with his clothes as they spun in the washer, mostly as the person manning the store today wasn't sending Clark any looks to indicate giving them a potential importu salt water dunk. After leaving his bag in front of the machine, and telling the attendant he'd be back in a bit, he walked the short distance to Lucy's.

Despite getting to know her more, Clark was thankful it was Lucy he found inside the store today rather than Barbara, and if the look on Lucy's face was anything to go by, she was just as happy that was the case.

"Clark!" She said as she set down a crate and beamed towards him. "Long time no see."

"Howdy Luce." He said with a smile of his own in return. He picked up a basket and walked towards her, nodding his head towards the crates of stock. "You busy?"

"Nah." She said with a bat of the hand. "The boys went up to Redding today and got my order, and I'm just putting it away, but that can wait." She looked up at Clark. "Much more interested in hearing about how you've been."

"Me?" Clark asked, unable to prevent the huff of laughter that came with it. "What can I say, it's been the same old, same old."

"Please." She said, putting her hands on her hips. "I haven't seen you in *months* and you're trying to tell me you haven't done anything in that time."

"Has it really been that long?" Clark asked, his disbelief apparent, but upon further thought he realised that was indeed the case. Time had a way of distorting itself out here, and his own recollection of its passing was unreliable to say the least. There had been times where days, months and even years had slipped past him and he was none the wiser to it. He chalked up today to another one of those occasions, and let out a sigh. "Well, I mean, I did some stuff. But nothing to write home about or anything."

Lucy rolled her eyes at that. "Lord, how you don't die of boredom on that little island of yours, I will never know."

“Hey, you might find it boring, I find it peaceful.” Clark said as he picked up a few cans of food and moved down the aisle.

“Right, right. Of course.” Lucy said as she started to unpack the crate near Clark and place more cans onto the shelf. “I know I shouldn’t be knocking other people's lifestyles, but I guess it’s ‘cause I'm trying to imagine what *I* would be like in that situation, and I know I'd end up going crazy from not having anything to do.”

“That's why you’re the one running a shop, and I'm the one fishing on an island all day.”

Lucy laughed at that. “You wanna know the funniest part, I didn’t even want to run this shop at first but when my brother left home, guess who was lumped with the family business.” She turned to Clark, gesturing to herself with her thumb. “This gal.”

“But you enjoy it now right?” Clark asked. “Or are you just really good at hiding it?”

Another laugh. “Oh yeah, I'm okay with it now. It used to grate on me, don’t get me wrong. I guess it was because it felt like my brother got to do what *he* wanted to do, and I didn’t.” She reached down and grabbed a can, though she didn’t put it on the shelf right away, opting to instead stare at the label. “Then again, I'm still here and he’s dead, so you have to wonder which one of us was the lucky one.”

Clark paused, turning to Lucy. “Oh, i’m--”

“Don’t apologize.” She interjected; finally setting the can on the shelf. “He did something dumb, and it cost him his life. I don’t deserve an apology for that.”

“Still,” Clark said, wincing. “Is that why you’re taking care of Barbara?”

“Yeah.” She said with a nod. “She was only a baby when Jim left us. Our parents were too old to do much other than give me and Barb a bit of financial support here and there, but I made it work and I've been making it work ever since.”

“You’ve done more than make it work, Barbara’s a terrific kid.”

“Thanks.” Lucy said wryly. “I like to think I've done a good job. Some people say she's just like me, but I often think they’re not meaning it as a compliment.”

“No no.” Clark smirked. “It's a good thing. She's nice. I spoke to her when you weren’t here and she was nothing but polite.”

“Right.” Lucy said, moving to another aisle. Clark followed and happened to pass the freezers. He picked up a steak that looked a little worse for wear and placed it in his basket. “She mentioned you dropped by when I was out.”

“Yeah, we had a little chat.” Clark thought for a moment, and then offered a small smile as he continued. “I’ve spoken with her a few times. One time I was gonna, but I didn’t get a chance to ‘cause she was talking with a boy, and you know how teens are all--”

“Wait. Boy?” Lucy asked, her eyes going wide. “What did he look like? Did you get his name? Was it Dick?” Despite not answering, Lucy went on as if he had. “Now, she knows she isn’t supposed to talk to that boy. When did you see her with him? Was it Marcos’ birthday party? Now she told me those boys weren’t gonna be there. When did you see them, Clark?”

“Uh.” Clark let out, his mind suddenly blank. He looked away, trying to think how best to navigate the impasse he currently stood before. “This was a while ago, Luce,” He began. “I doubt she’s *still* talking to him or anything, especially if you told her not to.” Lucy still didn’t look all too happy, and Clark found his curiosity rise as a result. “Why don't you want them talking? I haven't really spoken to his family much, but they don’t seem like terrible people.” *Rude, maybe, but nothing worthy of this kind of reaction.*

“Because he’s--” but she didn’t continue, cutting herself off with a huff. She looked at him then, her stare fierce. “Look, Clark, I wish I could tell you, but there are some things I can't trust nobody with and this is one of them. I told Barb not to talk to that boy, and I just need you to trust me when I tell you I have a good reason for it.”

Clark opened his mouth to push the issue, but in the end, didn’t. Something in her eyes told him that pushing would only make things worse, and as he felt he was already on thin ice, he didn’t want to

keep going.

In the end, Clark finished his shopping in relative silence, and despite Lucy's attempts at resuming their conversation with intermittent bouts of small talk, it did little to change the somber mood that lingered over him even as he left the store.

He knew Lucy must have her reasons, and yet he felt completely blindsided by the whole ordeal. With Salvator, it didn't really surprise him to be told to keep away from Marcos. In his eyes, Clark was a perverted merner, and Sal was only thinking of keeping his son safe. Perhaps that was why Lucy's reaction had struck such a nerve with him. He had always assumed she was more laid back, more relaxed in that regard. The idea of her banning her niece from seeing someone, for *any* reason, was one that had Clark deep in thought as he grabbed his now clean clothes from the launderette and made his way back to the boat.

A part of himself wanted to try to solve the issue; to try and figure things out and help, but that couldn't exactly be done with Lucy remaining silent on the matter. He tried to think of reasons *why* she might not want Barbara to get close to Dick, and he found there weren't that many options with what limited knowledge he had. The first thing that came to him was the fact that Dick's family were moving to the island. Her niece getting close to a quote unquote 'outsider' might worry her. But that idea was quickly scrapped. If Lucy truly was *that* against outsiders, Clark would have had no chance getting close to her.

The other idea was something Clark was more familiar with in his own upbringing. Barbara was a young woman, Dick, a young man. The idea of something or rather someone coming from their relationship was enough of a reason to show caution. Hell, Ma banned him from inviting girls home as a teen for that exact reason, so it seemed reasonable.

And yet, that didn't feel right either.

In the end Clark got no further with his theories. He didn't have enough to go on at the moment, but that could change. In fact, he hoped it would.

He finished up the rest of his errands and began to sail back towards his island. He listened for Blue's heart beat, and found it emanating from his usual fishing spot. Clark debated going back to the island and waiting for him there, but his melancholic mood ended up making the decision for him.

He brought his boat to a stop in the water, and went out onto the fishing platform. He knew he'd have to wait a while for Blue to surface, but upon focusing, he could hear his heartbeat already getting

closer. Satisfied he was coming back up to the surface, Clark walked into the kitchenette where he had dumped his shopping and went about heating up the pan for the steak.

After a quick sear, which did little to improve its outward appearance, Clark set it aside to rest. He then went about clearing the place up a tad, firstly by moving his bags of groceries into the cupboard for now, and his laundry bag into the bedroom. He would sort them out properly once home.

That however didn't kill as much time as Clark had hoped and in the end he was left waiting on the swim platform for a further hour as Blue made his leisurely way up towards him. He must have dozed off as he waited, as he was then awoken to the feeling of water on his face and upon opening his eyes, saw Blue looking back at him.

"Hey." He murmured.

Blue titled his head, a quiet chirp leaving him.

"I wanted to see you." He said. "Didn't know when you'd be coming back."

Blue looked somewhat surprised by that, and his expression only served to make Clark's cheeks grow warm with embarrassment. He cleared his throat and looked away.

That however caused Blue to move into his eye line, and this time, his expression was smug, pulled into an easy smile as he moved closer to Clark and pressed his lips against his. Clark laughed at that, and felt his embarrassment wane, even if the redness on his face remained. "Yeah, yeah, yuck it up, you gremlin."

Blue's lips remained on his even as he spoke, and as the seconds ticked on, Clark felt them part, a careful tongue darting out between them. Clark opened his mouth further, and the taste that greeted him was a mix of fish and salt that under normal circumstances, Clark was certain would have put him right off.

He did however concede, he hadn't been normal in a very long time.

He reached for Blue's hips, and once there, he held him tight, pulling his body flush against his. The press of his body was enough to cause the first involuntary buck of his hips, and the quiet growl Blue gave at the movement caused the ones that followed.

Clark was sure had they been allowed to continue down this path, that their instincts would have carried them through the process, but considering those same instincts were the ones that had left him with large gaps in his memory, he tried to instead think about *how* to proceed rather than letting his cock do it for him, specifically, so history wouldn't repeat itself.

"Hey." Clark murmured as he pulled back from Blue, though he wasn't entirely successful given how Blue decided to follow his mouth with his own. Through another bout of kissing, Clark managed to get a few more words out. "How are we gonna do this? I don't wanna end up forgetting everything again."

At the words, Blue's expression grew apologetic and he simply chirped and gestured down to his front, where the slit there was already parting to show the cock hidden within. Clark's eyes blew wide at the sight and he swallowed down the saliva pooling in his mouth. "Right, so how are we--"

But before he could finish, Blue slid off him, falling onto the wood and parting his slit further. He chirped at Clark, then looked at the tent in Clark's pants and pointed at his slit. Despite the lack of words, Clark was struck by how overt of a proposal was being made with those simple gestures. "You want me to--" Clark looked at the slit again, tilting his head. "You want me to fuck you?"

With an excessive amount of nods, Blue chirped. He brought one of his hands out to Clark's calf, gripping it tightly and that was enough to get Clark to start moving. "I just… I didn't even know I *could* do that." Clark said as he unzipped his pants and slid them down his thighs. "So I just put it right in there?" He pointed at the slit, and at the gesture, Blue brought his hand back and with a few firm presses of his finger, his cock slid fully out from his sheath, and upon pulling it up across his belly, he pointed towards the area underneath.

"Oh. Okay." Clark said, his mouth suddenly dry. He took a deep breath and moved over Blue, bringing their lips together once more.

Blue's hands came up to either side of his neck, holding him there, and with them both occupied, it took a moment for Clark to realise just what was currently gripping his cock. He pulled back briefly and upon seeing a flash of pink around his himself, he let out a small laugh. "That's a heck of a party trick you got there..." He murmured. Blue responded with a chip that soon morphed into a moan as

Clark wrapped his hand around their cocks, gripping them both firmly. “You ready for mine?” He murmured.

Blue nodded fervently, falling back against the wood, a series of chirps falling from his lips. As Clark’s grip tightened, he found Blue’s cock twisting from his own, to Clark’s forearm, wrapping around it and pulsing. He watched the movement, for a moment mesmerized, before quickly remembering just what he was doing here. He let go of Blue’s cock, and despite the soft growl Blue gave as a result, he figured he’d soon be forgiven, given what Clark was about to do.

He lined himself over the mer, and after leaning down towards his lips once more, he pressed forward, his cock finding the hole under Blue’s cock.

At first, as he pressed forward, Clark thought he’d made a mistake. He found after an inch of so, he could go no further. He would have pulled back to examine why that was the case, and perhaps learn more about *what* exactly he was putting his penis into, but he quickly found that that wasn’t going to happen. Blue growled at him and when Clark opened his mouth to explain why he wasn’t moving, no words came out, for Blue instead gripped Clark by the hips and all but forced him forward.

The ring of muscle that must have been stopping him quickly gave way at the intrusion, and Clark found himself groaning at the tight pressure suddenly engulfing his cock and could hear Blue reacting in a similar way. At least, he hoped that was the case, but the longer Clark lay on top of Blue, watching his face, the more he thought otherwise. “B, are you okay? Did you want me to pull out?”

Blue took a moment to respond and when he did, it was with a quick shake of the head and a shaky chirp. Clark wasn’t convinced, but upon actually attempting to pull out, those same hands that had pushed him forward, kept him at bay, and he was forced to remain where he was, static above Blue.

It didn’t last too long at least, only a few minutes, and after they had elapsed Blue’s eyes were on him, his lip wedged between those teeth and Clark's eyebrows shot up. “Oh? You ready for me to--”

Blue’s nails gripped tight into his flanks and Clark sucked in a sharp breath. “Okay, yeah, you got it.”

He pulled back, and upon his first thrust forward he was greeted by that same unrelenting grip around his cock. It was suffocating in a way, as the feeling had him breathless and the heat of Blue’s body around him had his mind growing cloudy the more he moved. He couldn’t even say he was in control of himself anymore, his body was on autopilot, as each thrust of his cock was done with the same ease as one might breathe.

He also soon found that Blue's cock was continuing once more with its party trick, but this time, Clark found it wrapping around his shaft and balls, and the noise Clark found coming out of his throat as a result was not one he had any recollection of ever making before.

Blue's own moans joined the fray, though the intensity of them soon had Clark worrying he was back to hurting him once more. That thought was soon scrapped however as Clark pulled back and saw the sheen of sweat and pink across Blue's face as well as those half lidded eyes. He let out a breathy laugh as he brought his mouth close to Blue's. "You like that, B? You like my cock in you?"

The screams only grew louder at that, and instead of wincing at them like Clark usually did, the sound of them only served to spur him on. "God, you're so beautiful." He said, his mouth operating on much the same system as his body; autopilot. "You know how fucking hot you are? You are fucking--"

But Clark didn't finish, his sentence cut off by the sensation of Blue tightening around him, of his cock gripping his balls even tighter. He gave a choked breath that quickly turned into a gasp as he came. Blue's own screams were lost in the miasma of his afterglow. Really, anything could have been lost in it; the whole world could have been burning and Clark wouldn't have been able to notice, his whole mind only occupied only by Blue.

He fell on top of him, his forehead damp against Blue's. For a moment, there was silence, with only the sounds of their harsh breathing breaking it. Eventually, Clark pulled back, his cock slipping from Blue, and with the mer's own cock slowly retreating back into his body, Clark fell beside him, looking up into the sky.

Perhaps it was his mood, or the absurdity of what they had done, but Clark felt himself smile. After watching the clouds pass for a few more minutes, he took a deep breath and turned his head by a fraction towards Blue. "You okay?"

Blue took a moment to respond, but when he did, he gave a lazy smile, turning his head towards Clark and chirping.

Clark sat up then, and let out a yawn. "I dunno about you, but I could go for a nap right about now."

A hearty nod was Blue's response, and so Clark slid his arms under the mer, picking him up and bringing him into the bedroom of the boat and setting him down on the mattress.

The rest of the day was spent in a haze of sleep, kisses and sex. Only interrupted by the occasional swim or quick meal. It was chilli straight out of the can for Clark, and the now cold steak for Blue. Despite its grey appearance and the fact it had been sitting out for a few hours by that point, Blue still devoured it regardless, and after eating they were more than ready to continue on with their activities.

Come morning, Clark awoke to find Blue beside him rather than on top of him. It was a welcome change if only for the fact that Clark could get up and use the restroom without having to first extract himself from under a fish shaped lump.

Once freshened up he debated changing his clothes. The ones he wore were from yesterday, and after what they had done last night, were just a tad disheveled. He did have a whole bag of fresh clothes right here on the boat, but sorting through them to find something to wear required just a tad more effort than Clark was able to muster up after having just awoken, and in the end, he went with the more traditional choice of a cup of stale coffee and toast.

As he sipped his coffee, he found he had enjoyed spending time on the boat. He doubted he could ever stay out here long term, but having things in different rooms and not all in one was already enough of a reason to prefer it. He could comfortably eat his breakfast in the kitchenette, and once done, could reenter the bedroom to see if Blue was awake.

Surprisingly, he was. He blinked a few times towards Clark before letting out a long yawn and Clark smiled and approached the bed. “Morning, sleepy head.”

Blue sent him a lazy grin before curling against the bedding, his hips wiggling from side to side. Clark laughed at the display, and only patted him on the flank. “Not right now, I'm still recovering from yesterday.”

Blue sent him a pout, but didn’t push the matter, choosing instead to stop his ministrations and slide off the bed. Clark walked beside him as he shimmied across the floor and out towards the steps to the swim platform. “You going back out?” Clark asked.

Blue nodded, and once on the platform, he pointed downwards and nodded.

“You gonna stay here?”

Another nod.

“Alright.” Clark shoved his hands into his pockets for lack of anything else to do and pursed his lips. “You uh, take care, okay? I’m gonna head back home.”

Blue nodded, though not before bringing one hand up and tapping a finger against his lips. Clark couldn’t help the smile that pulled across his face as a result and he quickly walked over to the mer and bent over, placing a chaste kiss on those lips. “See you later, Blue.”

With that, Blue slid into the water, and quickly made his way deep down below the surface. Clark watched him swim for a little while, and when he couldn’t make him from beyond the murky darkness he turned back towards the boat and made his way inside.

He started up the engine and headed back towards land. He made a short list of what needed to be done when he got home. His groceries needed to be stored, his clothes folded and put away, and his crops needed watering.

But those plans quickly were forgotten as he approached the island.

“What the--” Clark let out as he stared at the shore, or more specifically, *what* was on the shore.

There was someone on the beach.

Chapter End Notes

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... I wonder who's on the beach? (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Haha, anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter and it was worth the wait. I will say that reading all your lovely comments and seeing how much y'all are enjoying this story is really what keep me going, so I just want to say thank you again for all your kind words <3

As always, let me know your thoughts, and I will catch you all next time ;)

Chapter 25

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 20th 2016

As Clark's mind raced, he tried to calm himself. This was not necessarily a bad thing. *Don't jump to the worst case scenario,* he told himself. Fishermen on occasion stopped by his island should they need a reprieve from a swarm of mers on the prowl, but there in lied the issue. The man he saw didn't *look* like a fisherman. He looked painfully normal; wearing a simple dress shirt with black pants. Clark could almost convince himself that he had been plucked from an office and dumped on his island, and the more time he spent staring the more convinced he became that that must be the case.

By the time he came to a stop by his dock, the man had made his way over to meet him. As Clark hopped out of the boat, he looked him up and down, his confusion growing the more he took in. From a distance, his strange appearance was questionable but not inexplicable. Up close though, not so much.

He looked damp, but not drenched.

He was on the island, but there was no other boat anywhere nearby.

His arm was adorned with a silver wrist brace, the likes of which Clark had never seen before.

He looked familiar, and yet, Clark couldn't place him.

He looks a bit like... Clark paused. Yes, that was why he felt familiar. Those features, he'd seen them before, only not on a human.

Clark felt his mouth go dry at the realisation. It must be a coincidence, surely there was no way this man could be related to who he thought he was.

Eventually Clark knew he'd have to say something so cleared his throat.

"This is private land." Clark ground out as he braced his hand onto the side of the boat, his glare never lowering. "How'd you get out here?"

The man's eyes narrowed and that same spark of recognition Clark had felt himself washed across those features. Eventually his eyes blew wide, his voice barely above a whisper, "Clark?"

Clark's mouth fell open, his brows furrowing together. Maybe this was a sick nightmare. One where Blue could speak and lure him even further into the pit he now resided. Or, an even worse thought entered his mind. It arose from the area where his old life resided. A single man's name came to mind, and it was a name he hadn't thought about in years. Luthor.

What if this had been his plan all along? To pretend he had no idea where Clark went after he left Metropolis, but in reality, was keeping tabs on him the whole time. What if Blue was being controlled by Luthor; used to manipulate and control him until he was at his breaking point, and *this* was his coup de grace? To give him what he had thought he wanted. A human Blue. *And then what? Kill him in front of you?*

~~*You sound crazy right now. Not even a little crazy, like, full on 'tinfoil hat' crazy.*~~

And yet, his hands still curled into fists, ready for that possibility. "Who sent you?" He ground out.

"What--" The man let out, his eyes growing wide. "Look, I know this is going to sound weird." He began, clearing his throat when his words grew reedy. "But my name is Bruce Wayne, and I've come from another universe."

Clark raised a brow at that. Given his first impression of the man; that wasn't even as weird of an explanation as he had been expecting. It was also a small relief to hear that the man before him wasn't in fact a human clone of Blue sent here to destroy him by Luthor.

It was, of course, still weird. And of course, like all weird shit that happened, Clark just so happened to be the only one to bare witness to it. It didn't mean he had to do anything about it, though so he rolled his eyes and made to walk past the strange man. "I'm not in the League anymore. Go bother them with this shit."

“Wait--” The man reached for his arm, but before he could grab a hold, Clark’s hand was on his wrist, holding it there tightly.

“No. You leave. Now.” He let go and walked down the dock without another look backwards. If the man got to his island, it stood to reason he could get the Hell off of it himself.

The man called ‘Bruce’ however was not taking no for an answer, and followed after him. “Just give me a chance, okay? The fact is, this universe must have a Bruce Wayne in it, too. I’ve been doing this long enough to know.”

Clark blew a raspberry. “Don’t know anyone with that name.” He called over his shoulder, and of course, he had to catch a look at the downright pathetic expression on the man's face. He let out a sigh as he stopped and turned back around. “But you do seem like you need help, so I can take you to see Diana, she runs the League and she may be able to help you.”

God, he hoped he wouldn’t have to do that. He hadn’t seen Diana in so long, and after their last conversation he doubted that even travelers from other universes would be enough to stop her from kicking his ass.

“I don’t *need* to talk to her.” Bruce said with a huff. Clark tried to not let his relief on the matter show. “I know how to get out of here. I just need to rest, and eat, and then I’ll be on my way and you’ll never see me again.”

That would be nice if it were true, Clark mused. Sadly, he had plenty of experience with people that seemed to only need rest and yet chose to linger to the point of permanent residence. It was as he looked out into the waves, that he swiped those thoughts away. He’d made his bed in regards to Blue, he was staying in it no matter what so there was no use in dwelling on past mistakes. He looked to the man in front of him, his frown returning. “Fine. Come inside.”

He knew his shack was small, but thankfully Bruce kept any thoughts he had about his cramped quarters to himself. He went to sit on the recliner in the corner, Clark, on the edge of the bed. He reached under it, his hand grazing against the metal tub there. He found the crate of beer he kept under there for special occasions, got one out and opened it. “So, colour me intrigued.” Clark began, bringing the bottle to his lips. “When you say you're from another universe, what do you mean by that?”

The other man sat back in the chair, his eyes travelling upward in thought for a brief moment. “It means that there is something that differs between our worlds, causing us to have led different lives in one way or another. For instance, in my universe you work for the Daily Planet as a reporter, as well as having a side job as...” He gave a small smile. “As, well, Superman.”

At the word, Clark looked away, rubbing his hand across his face. He thought the name wouldn’t affect him anymore, and yet, hearing it still succeeded in dredging up all the ambivalent emotions associated with it. “I ain’t heard the name Superman in a while…” He muttered, his stare still cautious as he eyed Bruce. “So I guess that goes *part* way to proving your theory.”

“Well, we can confirm my theory quite easily, if as I said, we find my equivalent in this universe.” Bruce said with a resolute nod.

Clark sipped his beer. “Yeah, you seem dead set on that but I can tell you I ain't never heard of no ‘Bruce Wayne’.”

He frowned. “What about Batman?”

“Nope.”

He thought for a moment. “Gotham?”

A shake of the head.

Bruce’s stare grew wide as he seemed to process the information Clark had given him. He looked more than a tad confused but it was as his eyes came across the map behind Clark that something close to understanding came across his face. *Yes,* Clark wanted to say, *our worlds are very different.*

Bruce’s eyes eventually went back to him, and when they did, his brow quirked upwards. “Are you seeing anybody?”

Clark's eyes blew wide and the sip of beer he had been taking ended up erupting from his mouth in a cough. “*What?* ”

A mischievous smile tugged at Bruce's lips, threatening to come out. At the sight, something tugged in Clark's stomach. He'd seen that expression before. He knew it intimately. *No, it can't be...*

"It's just that in my universe, Clark and I are somewhat of an item. I was merely inquiring if you were seeing anyone yourself."

Clark's expression soured. "That's not funny." He set his beer down, his face burning. He had to be mistaken, this was a coincidence. It had to be. There was no way his crackpot theory could be any semblance of correct. "I thought you were being serious here, if you're just playing around with me-"

"I'm not." Bruce said earnestly. "I'm just-" He paused, his expression going pensive. "Curious." He settled on as he leaned forward, his eyes focused on Clark's. "You don't have to tell me, but, is there anybody?"

No there isn't.

Don't tell him.

But, he's…. Oh my God, he's-

Clark's hand curled into a fist, slowly tensing and releasing, his fingers mimicking the same motions of his mind. Should he fight or fly? This was too much, already it was too much and Clark knew that the longer he stayed here the more this moment would swallow him, but like the tide, he couldn't stop it. Time would keep moving forward and it was up to him to decide what he would do during it. Would he fly away, or press onward through to the unknown?

It was as he looked up and saw that familiar stare directed at him that his decision was made. He could not leave, he could not hide. His head lolled downward, his hand finally resting by his side, defeated. "I knew you looked familiar…" He began. "I just didn't want to believe it."

"Who is it?" He heard Bruce ask.

How do I even answer that? He thought to himself. *So it turns out you're a fish man here, neat huh? You also eat other mers on occasion, and I have seen you burrow your way inside of a whale.*

No, he only saw one way to explain the surreal nature of the world he lived in.

It was with slight reluctance that he got up from his seat and gestured back outside, towards his boat. “We need to go out to sea to answer that.”

He walked outside, not waiting to see if Bruce would follow him. After hearing the man's hurried footsteps behind him, he made his way onto the boat and set sail for the open ocean.

He knew where Blue would be. He hadn’t ventured beyond his usual spot, and despite his heartbeat being slower than usual, it wasn’t at a snail's pace which meant Clark shouldn’t have to wait for hours with the human Blue. Hopefully, he’d hear Clark’s boat on approach and come right back up. So he kept on heading towards his destination, ignoring ‘Bruce’ to the best of his ability.

This was simply something that Clark never thought would happen. Even when he was part of the League, his life never got this weird. To see Blue walking around and talking to him in something other than screams and chirps was unbelievable, to the point where a part of him didn’t even believe what this so-called ‘universe alternate’ was telling him. It had to be a load of shit, something this crazy could not possibly be how his Saturday went.

Yet another part himself, a part so small that Clark couldn’t even pinpoint where it spoke from, told him that what he was hearing was the truth. This man was Blue, though their differences were obvious and plentiful, it was still him.

They soon reached their destination. When Clark cut the engine and turned around, he found Bruce in the kitchenette, staring out of the window in quiet thought. He didn’t even notice Clark walking up to him, only being pulled from his reverie at Clark’s gentle touch against his shoulder. He didn’t speak, only raising a brow at him, who in turn gestured to the back of the boat.

He walked out onto the swimming platform, making sure to grab some polls and his cooler on the way. He hadn’t fished out here in a while, but he didn’t fancy the idea of simply sitting beside Bruce and waiting for Blue. For one, that invited the possibility of ‘talking’ and as Clark was still rusty on the whole ‘human interaction’ front, he’d rather be doing literally anything else. Fishing would distract him. Fishing would mean that he wouldn’t have to look at the man beside him more than necessary.

Clark sat down on the edge of the platform, removing his shoes and socks and dangling his feet into the water, kicking them both until the water splashed up.

He patted the wood next to him and Bruce came up beside him. He sat down, though kept his feet out of the water.

They were silent for a while, with Clark focusing on his fishing pole and Bruce staring at the water. He cleared his throat, and Clark eventually felt those keen eyes on him once more. “Just so we’re on the same page, this world isn't infested with Cthulhu style monsters that live in the ocean, right?”

Clark heard the words, but it took a moment to process them. Blue was swimming up to them, he realised. He could hear it in his heart beat. After a few more seconds of silence he eventually spoke. “Huh? Oh no.” He shook his head. “Nothing like that.”

Bruce gave a nod. “So what's the reason we’re out here then?”

“We're waiting for someone.”

“Right.” He pursed his lips. “Any idea when they’ll get here?”

“I don't know, could be a minute, could be an hour--” As he said the words, Blue’s head poked out of the water and at the mere sight of him, Clark broke into a smile. “Could be right now.”

Clark doubted Bruce was even aware of the noise he made as he took the sight of the mer in. Clark couldn’t exactly blame him. He was sure if he ever saw a mer that looked like him, he’d take a while to respond as well. He also found he didn’t care all too much about Bruce’s reaction. It was someone else's that took his attention. He watched Blue intently, seeing how those eyes never left Bruce, his stare remaining sharp and watchful even as the minutes ticked by.

Eventually he heard Bruce speak, though his voice sounded far less together than it had done earlier. “Okay... *this* I was not expecting.” He said, his disbelief evident. “I’m a merman here?” He asked.

Clark pressed his lips together. “Apparently.”

“And you're…” Bruce began, his face a wash with confusion. “In a relationship with him?”

“Yup.”

“How does that even work?”

At the question, memories of yesterday flooded Clark’s mind. After pushing the far more illicit ones away, he turned from the water to Bruce, his lips drawn thin.

Realising what he had asked, Bruce’s eyes blew wide. “I didn't mean it like that! I meant--” he cut himself off with a huff. “I *meant*, you live on land and he lives in the sea, I just would have thought that would be a difficult relationship to maintain.”

Clark however, only shrugged at the words. “Not really. I come out here on my boat, sure, but most of the time he swims to the shore and stays with me on land.”

Bruce raised a brow. “So he does come out of the water?”

Oh, he does more than come out of the water, his mind supplied. *Why don’t you tell him about all the things you do together out of the water?* Clark cleared his throat, ignoring those thoughts. He looked away. “Yes.” Was all he said.

“Do you ever go in?”

He faulted and only after a moment did he respond. “No.”

“Any reason?”

“He’s a mer.” He said blankly.

“You say that as if that's a bad thing.”

Clark couldn’t help it, he turned to Bruce, his anger flaring. “You not have mers in your universe?”

Bruce didn’t take his attitude lightly, and Clark watched his face contort into a tight frown. “Yes, we do, so I don't see why you can't get in the water with him.”

Clark laughed at that, though the sound was far from jovial. “Well, obviously we have different kinds of mers, ‘cause here, if you get in the water with them...” He reeled his hook in, taking the small fish on the end off. “You die.” He said as he went about throwing the fish into the cooler.

Bruce turned to him sharply. “Pardon?”

“You heard.” Clark jerked his head towards Blue, who still watched them both intently, his ears twitching with each word. Clark began to put more bait on the hook. “Mers are sneaky little fuckers, they lure you, tempt you, and then, when they finally have you, they either eat you alive or they toy with you until you drown.” Clark threw the line back into the water and this time, Blue dove down to swim around underneath it. “They’re pure evil.” Clark added once Blue’s face disappeared.

“And yet…” Bruce gestured his hand out towards the water. “You're in a relationship with one.”

“Yup.”

“Right.” Bruce turned to him. “Care to go into more detail?”

Clark shrugged his shoulders. Ordinarily that question would have been responded to with a cold hard ‘no’, but for some reason, he found talking to Bruce didn’t suck as much as he thought it might.

Perhaps it had to do with the fact that Bruce was just another version of Blue. Sure he didn’t scream or hit him, but Clark could still feel that same fire that fueled Blue in Bruce. Could feel it in how he spoke and held himself.

He also conceded that it wouldn’t hurt to get another person's perspective on the shit show that was his love life, and what better choice than an alternate version of the person you were acting in the shit show with. “Maybe,” he said as turned to him. He looked at Bruce’s empty hands and inquisitive stare before huffing. “Take that other pole there and start fishing. May as well be doing something useful if you’re just gonna sit there and gawp at me.”

Bruce did as he was told, taking the other pole Clark had grabbed and going about placing some bait on the hook. As he was doing so, Clark felt a tug on his line and upon reeling, found Blue’s hand on the fish there. He smiled as he continued to reel it in. Blue followed the line, and as Clark took the fish in his hand, the mer looked up at him, his hand coming out of the water and touching Clark’s thigh for a moment. As Bruce threw his own line into the water, Blue looked at him, a frown pulling across his lips before he went back into the water with a quiet grumble. He didn’t stay under for long though, opting to swim slightly further out and poke his eyes just out above the surface, watching them both.

“He doesn't seem to like me.” Bruce said.

That much was obvious to Clark. Blue never did well with company. He couldn’t exactly blame him though, his previous experiences with humans hadn’t exactly gone well. He wasn’t acting like he had around the boys however. Instead, he was acting much like he had around Marcos and Clark had a theory as to why that was. “He's very territorial. Probably sees you as competition.”

Bruce looked towards the mer then, tilting his head. “Can he talk?”

If you count screams and chirps, sure. “Not that I know of.” Clark said.

“Wouldn't you like to know?” Bruce began, throwing his line into the water. “I just can't imagine you have much of a relationship if you can’t even understand one another.”

“Hey. We understand each other plenty.” Clark bristled as he reached into the cooler, past the still wriggling fish, and took out a beer.

“How?”

Clark closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. “We just do."

Bruce reached into the cooler himself, though Clark didn't miss how he flinched at the fish grazing up against his hand. He fought back a smile as he watched him open it and take a sip. "You said he sees me as competition." He said after a moment.

"I did."

"What do you mean by that?"

Clark scoffed, shaking his head. "What do you *think* I mean by that?"

"A lot of things." Bruce said sharply. "Forgive me for apparently asking simple questions, but when the person answering them is as closed off as you, one has to ask the asinine."

Clark turned to him then, taking in that petulant frown and fighting the wave of warmth that sight caused in him. He couldn't help but smile, a small laugh working its way out. "I'll give you that one."

"Good." Bruce said haughtily as he turned from him and resumed staring at his fishing line. "So do you think you could drop the attitude?"

They didn't say anything for a while, with the only sound being that of lapping water against the boat. Sometimes, Blue would duck into the water only to return with his own fish, placing them in the cooler along with the beer. Clark watched him fondly, smiling his thanks upon receiving each of Blue's gifts. He then reached into the cooler and managed to find another can of beer despite the large number of fish now wiggling within, he offered it to Bruce, but the man shook his head. With a shrug, Clark opened it and took a sip. "Coming out here, you can just forget everything." He found himself say as he looked down at the can. "It's like all there is is you and the water, nothing else for miles and miles." His line pulled and he started to reel it in. "You're wrong though. You're never alone out here."

"How long have you lived by the sea?" Bruce asked.

Despite how innocuous the question was, Clark could feel the weight of it hit him like a sledgehammer. The four year anniversary of his time out here was only a few days prior, and yet, or perhaps because of it, it still felt fresh in his mind. "A while." Was all he said at first. He fully

intended for that to be the end of the sentence, but in the end, it wasn't. It felt as though the rest of the words were pulled from him without him having any say in the matter. "I used to live in Metropolis."

There was silence at the answer, and Clark could almost hear the next question before it was asked. "Why did you move?" Bruce asked.

"Metropolis was…" He began. It took him a while to gather up the rest of the words, but when he had them, he continued. After all, he only wanted to explain once. "We were hit badly by a tsunami." He paused then, throwing his line back out. "See, we get them a lot here. Lot of seismic activity in these parts. Most of the time that means tremors, the kind you can barely even feel, but sometimes it means waves so big that a seismograph may as well just read 'you're fucked' in great big letters."

"The wave knocked over skyscrapers, that's how powerful it was. Half of Metropolis became rubble in seconds. I tried to save as many people as I could, but there were too many and I just couldn't seem to move fast enough. People were drowning all around me, getting crushed by the debris or getting eaten by the fucking mers riding in after the wave." He looked at Bruce, then and didn't miss the sympathy he saw in those eyes. "I can't help but wonder what would have happened if i'd worked harder that day, if i'd paid more attention, maybe more of them wouldn't blame me for what happened."

Bruce frowned. "Why would they blame you? You tried to save them."

Did you though? At the thought, Clark's mind went to Lois; to the city he let crumble as he flew her far away. He was sure people saw him leave. He was also sure that their last thoughts were how Superman had left them to die. Clark closed his eyes. "No one wants to know if you 'tried' to save them. They only care if you succeed." He pulled another can from the cooler. "Diana wanted to keep me a member of the League after Metropolis fell, but I just couldn't…" Not after he lost Lois. Not after watching thousands die because of his failures. He took a sip from the new can and stared at the water. "Not like anyone misses me, though. After Metropolis, I'm sure they're glad Superman went AWOL."

"Clark…" Bruce turned towards him then, his hand finding the small of his back. "You did everything you could. That's something people always forget after the fact; in times of crisis you have to act, there isn't time to think about the different possibilities, chances are more would have died if you had."

Would he still say that if he knew what you really did? If he knew how you let Metropolis fall? Clark shook the thought from his mind. "I like to think I forgave myself for what happened, but sometimes I wonder if I really have. It still stings, but I guess memories have a habit of doing that, even old ones."

Bruce nodded at that. “I know. Believe me, I know.”

They didn't talk again, not for while. They didn't need to, their silent understanding speaking volumes. Bruce kept his stare out across the water, watching as the waves came and went. Clark too became lost in thought, so much so that he didn’t even realise Bruce had asked him a question until he felt a slight bump against his shoulder.

“How much do you know about them?” He'd asked, his eyes trained on Blue.

“We know a bit.” Clark said after some thought. “What little marine biologists have managed to observe of them out in the wild is that they’re pack hunters, live in small clusters, never alone. Thing is, I've never seen Blue with any other mers, so I guess he’s a loner or he lost his pack. ”

Bruce smiled and it took Clark a minute to realise why. “Blue?”

Clark felt his face grow warm and he looked away. “Well, yeah, I don't just call him ‘it’ or ‘mer--’” *Not anymore,* “--no, I call him Blue ‘cause…” He huffed. “He’s blue, well, some of him is blue…” He glared at Bruce. “Stop looking at me like that.”

Bruce did indeed stop looking; his smile however did not waver. “What does he think about his name?”

Clark shrugged. “I don’t think he minds. Like don’t get me wrong, he can’t talk, but can scream like a banshee when he wants to so it’s not like he can’t let me know if he hates it.”

He saw Bruce nod at that and for a while remained quiet. Whenever Clark happened to glance his way, he saw how flushed he looked, how sweat ridden his shirt had become. He didn’t exactly look any better, so he said nothing about it until Bruce jerked his head towards the shady area at the back of the boat and made a move to stand up. “I think I'm gonna sit in the shade for a bit.”

Clark splashed his feet around. “Put your feet in the water, that’ll cool you.” He looked up at Bruce’s unsure face, and continued. “Trust me.”

“Yeah…” Bruce said, his lips pressing into a fine line. “I’d rather not, I don't-”

“He won’t pull you in if that’s what you're worried about.” He said, looking back towards Blue, still swimming languidly just beneath the surface. “And you don’t have to worry about any others trying to do it whilst he’s here either, when he's around the others keep away.”

“Why?” Bruce asked, raising a brow towards the mer in question.

“It’s like I said. He's territorial. Anyone who fights him in the water, doesn’t win. Believe me. I’ve seen enough corpses out here to know. He’s ruthless.”

“Is that why you don’t go in the water with him, you think he'd try and kill you?”

“Yeah.” Clark muttered. Despite how much he had seen to the contrary, the fear that this could all be an act, was still ever present in his mind. It haunted him, just as much as Metropolis. “Keyword: try. He doesn’t know what I am. To him, I’m just a regular old fisherman, and as long as I stay out of the water, that's how it will remain. The minute I get in the water and he pulls me down, well, *tries to* , is when all this ends.” Clark closed his eyes. “And in case you ain’t realised, I don’t want it to end.”

Bruce eyed him, his expression wholly serious. “Do you love him?”

He opened his mouth to answer with a single word, but when he tried to, found he couldn’t. In the end it took him a while to speak. He set aside his pole and brought his hand out over the water, with his palm barely above the surface. Almost immediately, Blue stopped swimming and approached him. He brought his own hand up, and touched Clark's own. “I wasn't lying when I said we understand each other.” Clark said as he watched Blue through the water. “He stays ‘cause he wants me; for eating, for fucking, I don’t know, and I stay because I don’t like being alone anymore.” He wrapped his fingers around Blue’s and squeezed them before letting go and pulling his hand free. Blue’s hand still lingered there for a while longer, reaching up towards him, before he too pulled back, letting his hand slink back into the water.

He heard Bruce beside him, trying to speak, but no words came. Clark couldn’t blame him. He wouldn’t know what to say to someone as depressing as him, either.

“Maybe I'm an idiot for thinking that, but I can’t help it.” He continued, more to himself than to Bruce. “There’s something about him that keeps me here. Maybe it's a vain sliver of hope that everything I know about his species is wrong. That he doesn't just act like this with me because he wants me to lower my guard and pull me down when he gets the chance.” He didn’t pick his pole back up, suddenly done with the idea of fishing. He sat back with his hands held together on his lap as he watched the water.

He took a deep breath, and chanced a look at Bruce, at those eyes full with concern. He couldn’t help but feel his own water. “I know it mustn't seem like it, but I really am glad I got to meet you. If you’re right about this whole universe thing, it makes me think that maybe I’m right about him and a little part of you might be in Blue.” He closed his eyes. “Maybe he isn’t evil and maybe… Maybe he loves me back.”

He closed his eyes, and waited. Though what he waited for, he wasn’t sure. Maybe divine intervention. For God himself to come down and smack him for being a moron. In the end though, what he felt was a lot more human. Arms wrapped around him, strong and firm and he savoured the feeling. Allowing it to ease the pain he felt inside.

He soon felt Bruce let go though, and when he cracked his eyes to see why, he saw the man's face awash with fear. “Clark, I don’t--”

But he didn’t get to finish his answer as Blue lunged forward, his hands grabbing at Bruce’s legs and pulling him swiftly into the water.

Clark’s eyes blew wide, and for a moment, he simply sat there; dumb founded. It wasn’t that he didn’t expect this to happen, but for it to happen so suddenly had Clark feeling as though he had just experienced whiplash.

He also knew he didn’t have long to act given how long a human could generally hold their breath for and despite how much his body screamed at the idea of going into the water voluntarily, he did it anyway.

He could hear Blue screams clear as day the moment he dove into the waves, and as he swam, he realised he could also see him. He was glowing and at the sight of it, Clark’s eyes blew wide. He had never seen him glow before, Hell, he’d never heard of mers glowing at all but that was a problem for another time, he quickly rationalised.

With a burst of speed he was by the pair. He grabbed Bruce by the arm and tugged him upwards, ignoring Blue's wide eyes on him, as well as the stares of the other mer's watching them through the water. He simply focused on getting Bruce to the surface, swimming furiously. He did not want to linger down here.

That point was further made when he heard the screams renew as well as see the body of a mer begin to float up beside them. *Great.*

When they reached the surface, he flung Bruce onto the decking, and looked him over. He didn't *look* like he was dying, which was something, but he still asked, "you okay?"

Bruce, too busy sucking back mouthfuls of air, only nodded. With that Clark stared down at the water, a look of fear spreading across his features. He knew Blue was strong, knew Blue could handle himself, but the sheer number of mers currently swimming around beneath them had Clark's palms growing clammy. Should he wait? Or should he do something?

As if on autopilot, he dove back in and found Blue where he had left him, biting and clawing at every mer foolish enough to approach. The rest of the group remained static in the water, watching the fight as it progressed. Not that it went on for much longer with Clark grabbing Blue by the haunches and dragging him to the surface. Even in the water, he managed a yelp as Clark began to swim upwards with him. He clearly was not happy with the situation, given how he thrashed, but Clark didn't care one bit.

Once they were back on the surface, Clark threw Blue across his shoulder and climbed up onto the platform. He made his way inside, and after a moment called out to Bruce. "Hey, if you're done nearly dying, can you help me in here?"

When Bruce found them inside, he still looked shaken, but his voice was remarkably even when he spoke. "You weren't lying about the corpses." Was all he said.

Clark barely looked up at him as he tried to pull a sheet of plastic over his bed. Thankfully as Bruce watched him struggle, he came forward to flatten the material, allowing Clark to set Blue down onto the mattress, now only appearing slightly annoyed by the whole situation. "Yeah, by the time I got back down to him he was causing Hell..." As Clark gave him a once over, he faltered at the sight of the blood slowly pooling across the plastic. "They got a few scrapes in though, didn't they, Blue?" He brought his hand out and swiped the damp hair from the mer's face. "Grab the first aid kit, will you?" He asked as he turned to Bruce. "In the cabinet over there."

When Bruce returned with said kit, Clark made quick work of the cuts, suturing the wounds with a practiced ease. “You’ve done this before.” Bruce said. It wasn't a question, Clark didn’t so much as stumble as he cut the thread with his teeth and went onto the next cut.

“First time I found him was when he washed up on the beach, covered in cuts and scrapes.” Blue whined as Clark pushed the needle into the flesh, and for the next one Clark made sure to be gentler. “I thought he was dead. Brought him into my house and was gonna call a researcher to come and get him, but it turns out he wasn’t as dead as I first thought, and he started screaming and I…” he put down the needle and ran his finger along the neatly sewn stitch. “I didn’t end up calling anyone.”

Clark often wonders what would have happened had he called Elijah that day. Would he have gone through with it when the man showed up on his beach? Or would he have had second thoughts? As he pondered, Clark realised he couldn’t conceive of things having gone differently that day. To even try and think about it, pained him.

Bruce didn’t press further, waiting for Clark to finish his checks of Blue. Once he was done, he stood up and heaved a sigh. “We better head back to land, I need to soak him.”

“Soak him?”

“Yeah, just something I came up with after his first near death, and perfected after the hundredth.”

Clark walked out of the room, brushing past Bruce as he did. Immediately Blue began to hiss and attempted to move across the plastic before slipping unceremoniously to the ground in a heap, another pitiful whine following as he did. Clark quickly returned and rolled his eyes. “What is up with you today? Stop being a little shit.” He knew he got like this sometimes, but it usually only took one scolding to prevent him from acting like a complete idiot.

Blue reached for him and gave another whine but Clark only shook his head. He wasn’t about to reward bad behavior, even if the mer looked downright pathetic. He instead ushered Bruce out of the room, ignoring the renewed bout of screaming as he closed the door. “He’ll be fine.” Clark said with a wave of the hand, only jumping slightly as a pounding and scraping began against the wood. “Maybe just keep away from the door.” He said, frowning at the quaking surface.

With Bruce out on the deck, they set sail for the island. Blue eventually quieted down, though Clark doubted that meant he was over whatever had chosen to crawl up his ass, and was instead too tired to

do anything else about it.

When they got back to land, Clark opened the door to the bedroom and found Blue still sitting there on the floor, looking up at him with wide, pathetic eyes. Clark raised a brow at him. “You gonna stop acting like a moron?”

Blue didn’t say anything, but he did give a small nod.

“Alright…" Clark said, reaching for him and scooping him into his arms. By the time he jumped off the boat, he found Bruce already there, looking around the island. Thankfully, Blue didn’t resume his earlier screams upon seeing the other like Clark half expected. Instead, he only wrapped his tail around Clark as he walked them both inside the cabin.

If the place had felt cramped with just Blue, there was now next to no space with the edition of a third body. Clark set Blue on the bed, no time nor space for the plastic tarp. He slid the tub out from under the bed and carried it on his shoulder. He turned to face Bruce standing in the doorway. “Gonna go fill this with sea water.” He narrowed his eyes at the man. “Don’t, you know.” He wiggled his brow.

Bruce frowned at the gesture. “What?”

Clark rolled his eyes. “You know.” At Bruce’s silence, he continued. “Make him angry.”

Bruce huffed a breath and crossed his arms. “Believe me if I knew what set him off, I wouldn’t do it.”

Clark only shrugged at that, and soon slipped past Bruce to get out of the door. He brushed his shoulder against him, and not even a second later he heard Blue start screaming. He turned to him, his eyes wide. He set the tub down and approached Blue who had once more slipped from the bed onto the floor. There was blood on the sheets he had just changed. The wounds were reopening. “God dammit. What are you doing?” He asked Bruce as he lifted up Blue and tried to settle him on the bed.

Then he heard a single word, so quiet it could have been mistaken for a thought given voice. “Touch.”

“What?” Clark turned his head by a fraction, and this was not the thing to do as Blue was renewing his swipes in Bruce's direction.

“I touched you, on the deck. That’s why he pulled me down. Then when you walked past me on the boat, and now when you…” Bruce said, letting the sentence hang in the air.

Was that really it? Was it really just touch that set him off on his episodes? He thought to Marcos, to all the times he’d seen the mer show his distaste. Suddenly all of his mood swings made a Hell of a lot more sense, and upon looking into those eyes what he saw there compelled him to do what he did next.

Clark grabbed him by the head and pulled their lips together, holding him there tightly.

It was astounding how quickly the fight left the mer. It was as though the whole of his body went limp upon contact with Clark. He moved his lips for a moment, but quickly stopped given the audience they had. He pulled back then, and only once Blue reclined against the bed with an easy smile did he get up, pick the tub up and go outside.

Once out, he went to the boat first, grabbing their haul of fish. Despite Bruce not saying anything, it didn’t take super hearing to hear the grumble of his stomach as they had fished. He then went about filling the tub with water and grabbing a few strands of seaweed whilst he was there.

When Clark came back, he set the tub down in the middle of the room, as well as place the cooler beside his stove top. He then grabbed Blue and eased him into the water and after quickly wrapping the worst of his wounds in seaweed, he turned his attention to Bruce who just so happened to be staring at the fish in the cooler. He answered that look with a smile. “Hope you're hungry. We caught a lot.”

Bruce nodded at that, and Clark reached for his knife though not before jerking his head towards the bed in the room. “It’s gonna take me a while to scale and clean ‘em, you can lay down if you want.”

He could see after his stint in the water that Bruce could use a nap. The man himself didn’t even attempt to object as he made his way to the bed and quickly pulled the blanket up. He didn’t comment about the damp sheets or blood stains, and Clark couldn’t tell if he should be worried or thankful for

that. He was asleep not long after and Clark soon turned his attention to Blue, who still watched him from the tub. “You okay?” He asked.

Blue looked down at his body. He gave his wounds once over then looked back up at Clark and nodded.

Clark brought his knife to a fish and began descaling it. He huffed at Blue’s answer and after finishing one fish off he grabbing another and shook his head at the mer. “That’s not what I mean. I *meant*, are you okay about the whole--” he used the hand not currently holding a fish to gesture between the mer and human, and when he did, he saw Blue’s eyes blow wide.

He looked away, his face dusted with pink, and nodded again.

“Good.” Clark said with a resolute nod, turning his attention back to the fish. “‘Cause you’re stuck with me. I ain’t leaving you for no one else. Not even universe equivalents, alright?”

He heard a chirp then, and when he looked over, Blue’s eyes were on him, and judging by his hand placement he was going to try and get out of the tub. Sensing a repeat of earlier-- ripped stitches and blood galore-- Clark set down the knife and fish and quickly made his way beside the tub. “What?” He asked as he crouched down.

Blue reached for him, his hands going to either side of his face. He pulled him in close, and just as their lips touched he let out another quiet chirp. Clark smiled into the kiss, allowing it to go on for a little longer than necessary. After Blue pulled back he stood up and shook his head. “Lookit you, acting all sweet and innocent.” Clark cooed as he went back to the counter. “Don’t think I forgot you killed five mers earlier, and tried to kill that one--” Clark said as he pointed to the man asleep in the bed.

Blue at least had the decency to look sheepish as he shrugged his shoulders and sunk down into the tub. He didn’t talk much after that, opting to rest his own eyes for a little while.

After Clark had scaled most of the fish, leaving a few whole for Blue, he went about frying up their bounty.

It wasn’t long after the first fillet hit the pan that Clark heard Bruce begin to stirr. He turned towards the bed and found the man sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “You're up.” He said. “Good, fish

will be ready soon.”

Bruce took a deep breath as he stretched. He then turned his attention to the mer in the tub, staring at his closed eyes. “Is he asleep?” Bruce asked.

“Yup, he nodded off shortly after you. He gets bored sitting in the tub.”

Bruce nodded, and looked at the merman closely. “His wounds.” He said simply and Clark turned back around, making a noise of agreement.

“Oh yeah, it's the seaweed. It works wonders, I swear.” The first fillet looked cooked and he set it on the plate before passing it to Bruce with a flourish of the hand. “I wasn’t lying when I said there was plenty.” He said as he reached for another fish from his pile of cleaned ones and set it in the pan.

“Aren't you going to have some?” Bruce said through a mouthful of fish.

“Maybe.” Clark said with a shrug of the shoulders. “You have what you want, and I'll have the rest.” He looked to the sleeping merman, a mischievous smile spreading across his lips. “Now that I think about it, Blue is probably hungry too...” He reached for the pile and flung one onto him.

He meant to throw a whole one, but he must have grabbed from the wrong pile evidently as a cleaned fish went sailing through the air and hit Blue square in the stomach. At the contact, his eyes blew open, darting around the room before finding the cause of his rude awakening laying dead on his chest. He glared at Clark from the water, a quiet growl escaping him.

Clark winked at him, and despite the annoyance, Blue’s cheeks grew pink as he began to nibble at the fish. Bruce watched the interaction and then turned to Clark. “He prefers it raw then?”

Clark nodded. “As raw as possible. He doesn’t even like that I've cleaned it. See how he's nibbling?” Clark set the pan off the burner and this time took a fish from the other pile. Instead of throwing it though, this time he leant over the tub, holding the fish out towards Blue. The mers eagerness was apparent with how quickly he discarded the cleaned fish, flinging it to the side as he grabbed and tore into the whole one, gnawing at his skull and sucking out the eyes. Unlike Bruce who seemed to recoil at the sight, Clark only smiled fondly at his little trash gremlin.

Bruce ate another plate before he told Clark he could have the rest of the fish. He lay back against the bed and dozed as Clark ate his own food. He didn't think Bruce meant to fall asleep again, but a full stomach and a warm bed were hard to resist at the best of times.

As he slept, Clark finished his food and looked over to Blue who was now picking at the bones of the fish. "What do you wanna do now?" He asked.

Even with the injuries, Blue pointed to the door, and Clark nearly shook his head. It was a bad idea to let Blue go out swimming especially after what had happened only a few hours prior, and yet, as though sensing Clark's disagreement, Blue gave his best puppy dog pout, and despite it all, Clark conceded, though it was with a heavy sigh. "Alright, you can go out, but stay near the island. And don't swim too hard, I don't want the seaweed to come off or for the stitches to rip."

A series of chips and nods was Blue's answer, so Clark set his plate on the counter and went to the side of the tub, easing Blue into his arms and carrying him out to the shore.

He set him in the lapping water, and remained crouched by his side. "Be safe." Was all he said, and with a gentle smile, Blue kissed him before slinking into the water and swimming away.

Clark stood there and watched the area of water he saw into. It felt like it had only been moments, but with each blink it was as though the sun moved further and further across the sky until it was already early evening. He heard Bruce stir from within the cabin, but still, he didn't move, rooted in place as he was in the sand and water.

After getting up from the bed, Bruce walked out of the cabin and over to him and once by his side, asked, "how long was I out?"

It took Clark a moment to answer, his mind still occupied with the sight of the waves. "A couple hours. Blue got restless so I let him back into the water."

"Right." Bruce nodded. He was quiet for a moment, and then turned to Clark, his voice soft. "I wanted to say thank you, for everything. I really appreciate it."

Clark looked at him then, and gave a single nod. "Any time."

Bruce’s eyes stayed on him, and he let out a shallow breath before speaking. “I know it doesn't mean much coming from me, but I don't think you're an idiot." He set his hand on Clark's back, in the same place he had earlier, and just as it had before, it infused Clark with a feeling of warmth. "I know I've only been here a day, so I'm not going to act like I know even half of what you do about this place, about mers, about Blue, but...” He turned to him. “I really think he cares about you. In fact, I think he loves you just as much as you love him.”

It took a moment for him to muster the strength to do it, but eventually he looked up at Bruce, eyes glistening. “Bruce, coming from you, that means everything.”

Bruce smiled back at him, before turning his attention to the silver wrist brace he wore. “Right, well, I should probably be heading off now.” He said quietly.

Right. Of course Bruce wasn’t going to stay. That made sense, and yet, it still took Clark by surprise. In the short time he had been here, he began to feel familiar, a part of his life, then again, considering who his equivalent was, that did make sense. He cleared his throat and gave a sharp nod of the head. “Right, of course. Back to your universe I take it?”

“Yes. Back home.”

“Well, it was nice to meet you.” Clark said stiffly, as he gave a brief turn of the head in his direction.

“And you Clark.” Bruce said, stepping towards him and holding his gaze in his own. “I'll be seeing you.”

Clark wanted to share the sentiment, but by the time he had opened his mouth, Bruce was already gone.

Clark couldn't help but wave his hand in the space he had only moments ago occupied, but Bruce was no longer there. He had completely disappeared. Vanished into thin air.

Whatever he had used to do it must have been powerful indeed. If he cared enough, and could guarantee his ass would remain un-kicked, he'd bring it to Diana's attention, but he didn't and couldn't, so, he decided that this dalliance with another universe would have to remain somewhat of a secret.

A secret known by only him and Blue.

At the thought, he closed his eyes and let Bruce's words come back to him. *I think he loves you just as much as you love him.*

He prayed to every God he knew that Bruce was right.

Chapter End Notes

People who read Infinite before reading this fic: !!!!

People who didn't read Infinite before reading this fic: ???

I know I said at the beginning of the first chapter that this is a standalone fic so you didn't need to read Infinite in order to read this, but I guess I lied XD

I also know to some of y'all this is just a chapter is like any other, but for me this marks a pretty momentous occasion. 3 years ago I wrote a chapter in a story of mine about a curmudgeonly sea weary Clark and a vicious merman Bruce and didn't really expect anything to come from it. Now here I am, with over 100k words of a new story, some lovely fan art from some incredible artists, and a bunch of avid readers who leave me the best theory comments a gal could ask for.

(I won't say this next paragraph is full of 'spoilers', but I'm just going to warn y'all that I'm going to be talking about my writing of this story and the experiences associated with it, so if you don't wanna risk it, i'd recommend not reading it.)

I have always been somewhat limited with what I could do with this story, entirely due to the fact that I have been trying to keep it to the confines of what Clark in Infinite knew. That is the reason Clark has been rather dense about certain things, and for him to not do things that might seem like 'common sense' to some. In fact I ended up tweaking/editing a bunch of this chapter in Infinite just so it would work in the context of what we now know in Salnity. I know I could have just thrown out the continuity from Infinite, and not even included a chapter about it, but I just couldn't do it. I know some of you might think the story is weaker for having gone down this route, but it is what it is, and I only hope you enjoy the rest of the story. Especially as now I am not limited by Infinite. We are in brand new territory here folks, and I hope you are ready for the ride.

Anyway, sorry about the essay. I suppose I shall end it by saying thank you to all of you who comment, kudos and read my silly little mermaid fic. I appreciate every single one of you and I

hope you all have a wonderful day <3

Chapter 26

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 20th 2016

I know I haven't written in here in a while, weird semen related amnesia notwithstanding, but I just know I need to write down what happened today so that tomorrow I don't wake up thinking it was all a fucked up dream.

A man appeared on my island today. He said his name was 'Bruce Wayne' and that he came from another universe. To cut a long story short, he is Blue. The same person who hisses and swipes at me on the daily apparently lives as a normal human being in another universe.

I get that multiverse theory is a thing but to see actual, tangible, proof that there are other universes that exist along side this one, is just insane to me. The more I think about it, the more I'm kicking myself for not asking more about how he was able to travel between universes in the first place. If I was to ever bring it up to anyone else, the first thing they'd ask me is 'well, how did he do it?' and I'd have to respond with a fucking shrug.

To be fair, it's not like I actually plan on telling anyone. I can't exactly talk to Marcos or Lucy about this. I don't wanna talk to Diana on account of the ass kicking I know is still pending. Even if I were to go speak with Dinah like I was planning, I doubt I could bring any of this shit up lest have her think I hallucinated the whole thing.

Which, I won't lie, did also cross my mind. But then I figured, hey, I doubt even I would have been able to make up something this fucked, so it must be have been real.

I also wanna write down something 'Bruce' said to me whilst he was here. He said that he thinks that Blue really does love me. That he isn't just using me, and fuck, I want to believe him. He is Blue after all, surely if any person in the fucking multiverse can tell me what Blue's thinking, it's himself.

But that fear is still there. I have an idea of how to settle this once and for all, and I'll just have to see if I have the nerve to go through with it tomorrow.

August 21st 2016

He barely slept last night.

He wanted to. He had every reason to after the day he had. He wanted nothing more than to shut his eyes and welcome sleep, but his stomach churned whenever his mind ventured into what he had planned come morning.

Blue slept in the tub that night. After returning from his swim, he allowed Clark to carry him inside, and not long after, fell asleep, unlike Clark, who went to follow suit and promptly failed, leading to this moment.

It was now what one could acceptably call morning. Meaning it was far too early for normal people to be up and about, but hey, the sun was technically out so the term ‘morning’ still applied. Clark sat up in bed and when he did, rubbed his eyes to try and alleviate the sting in them.

He looked over to Blue, who for all intents and purposes, was still dead to the world. Clark however wasn’t above waking him up, especially as he wanted this morning to be over and done with as soon as possible. He swung his legs off the side of the bed and leant over to tap the mer on the shoulder.

He was ignored at first, given a faint grumble that told Clark that unless the earth was ending, he didn’t wish to be woken. But Clark persisted; his tapping only growing harder. After a minute, Blue grumbled, his eyes sliding open as he sent a confused chirp Clark’s way. “We need to go out.” Clark said in a voice far more together than he felt.

Blue raised a brow at that, pointing out the door. Clark only nodded.

After that, Clark scooped Blue out of the tub and carried him the short distance to the boat. He set Blue inside on the bed still covered with plastic, and went to start up the boat. It was eerie how little Clark felt in control of his actions. He was aware of every step and movement he made, but didn’t feel

as though he was the one making them. If he were, he doubted he would be doing this, as every fiber of his being was screaming at him not to.

The trip to his fishing spot was uneventful, and when they arrived, Clark went to the bedroom. He found Blue lounging on his side across the bed, perking up noticeably as Clark walked in. Clark however was still moving on autopilot, and simply scooped Blue up and carried him out to the swim platform. He set him down on the edge and waited for him to get in.

Clark was aware of the sound of splashing water, the feeling of a few errant droplets across his feet. He could feel the cool breeze across his face, the rub of his cotton shirt every time he breathed. But that was it. Everything else in his mind was a whirlwind of chaos as he looked down at the water and truly contemplated his next actions.

He's going to drag you down. One of the many thoughts screamed.

Don't do it. You know he loves you, what do you have to prove? Another yelled above the cacophony.

~~*He won't do anything to you and then you'll finally know. You will finally know the truth that has been smacking you in the face daily. He loves you, Clark.*~~

The last thought was like aloe on a burn. It eased Clark considerably, and as it repeated in his mind, he took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

He thought about saying something, thought about speaking to the mer looking up at him in question, but he didn't, in fact, the moment that should have felt momentous instead felt all the more mundane for how little fanfare accompanied it.

Clark stepped off the platform, and fell into the water.

His head dipped under the surface for a moment and the panic that gripped him as a result was unimaginable. Yesterday, he had been able to repress that fear, that panic, but now here he was, without that distraction present. There was no one in need of saving, there was only himself and Blue, all alone in a vast openness of water.

He poked his head back out of the water and tried to get his breathing under control. His heart was hammering, but he ignored it as he peered over at Blue.

His face, that's what caught him. Clark didn't know until this moment what expression he expected to see on Blue's face should he ever get in the water with him again, but given Clark surprise, what he saw was not it.

Blue was in shock.

His eyes were wide, to the point the whites around his pupils were wholly visible. His mouth was open, his lips trembled as though sounds might come from within, but never did. And lastly, his complexion, always fair, was virtually white as he stared at Clark floating beside him in the water.

Then he lunged for him.

Clark felt the water engulf him once more. He could also feel time passing, experiencing it like he had all throughout his life, but the next few moments passed much like they did when he was back in Metropolis; back when he'd seen Lois hanging from that building. Time ceased to move, and yet at the same time, rocketed past him at such a speed that he felt helpless.

So this is what drowning is like , Clark thought numbly to himself as Blue continued to swim downward. If he were human, he probably would have drowned by now, the panic and shock having caused him choke down sea water.

But he wasn't human, he was Superman, and watching Blue swim deftly into the depths had Clark wondering how he could have fallen for this in the first place.

Why is he doing this? A part of himself asked. He wanted to know so badly how he could have gotten things so wrong. Was he just willfully blind to it all? Did he misunderstand everything they had?

No. it's like you said yesterday. They are pure evil.

But… That can't be it. There had to be another reason, something else, he couldn't be wrong here. Could he? What if--

His head lanced with pain as a memory came to him,

‘No-- get away from me!’

~~*'Clark, please!/You don't understand!'*~~

‘I understand you’re a freak!’

Clark let out the breath he had been holding, watching the stream of bubbles rush by him. He wasn’t aware of his movements, only that he kicked Blue, his leg jutting out with enough force that he knew he broke a rib. Upon contact, Blue screamed, pulling away and whirling on him. He was glowing again, but much like the last time, Clark didn’t have time to address that, nor did he want to. He had never felt more vacant, and if he knew it would, he’d have let Blue continue to drag him down so that this life of his would finally come to an end.

But that wasn’t going to happen. Not now, not for a long time.

Clark swam up and out of the water, before pulling himself onto the platform. Upon feeling the sun on his skin, he knew he should fundamentally feel better, and yet, he didn’t. He doubted he'd ever feel normal again.

I told you , the snide voice in his mind taunted. *Say goodbye to your lover, he’s not coming back after this.*

He was well and truly alone.

Never again would he feel love.

Or be loved. Even as an act.

He started to walk inside.

Then the screaming started.

Clark slowly turned from where he stood on the platform, and whether he meant to or not, his mouth fell open at the sight of Blue's head poking out of the water.

He looked livid. More than livid, he looked furious, and Clark felt his own anger burn.

"Are you kidding me?" Clark ground out, his fists curling tight. "Are you fucking screaming at me because you couldn't kill me?"

Blue's screaming stopped, and his expression took on that of pure indignation. He slapped the water with his hands and continued to scream.

"Don't you fucking dare! This was your plan from all along, wasn't it? Get me to lower my guard so you can kill me? Drag me down until I drown? Well tough shit asshole, you can't! I'm not human!"

Blue expression only grew more enraged, and in a burst of movement he was out of the water, coming for him.

Upon contact, Clark fell back against the platform with Blue on top of him. In the confusion of it all, he wondered what Blue would try to do to him. Would he drag him back down and hope he'd actually drown this time?

No. That wasn't what he did.

He swung at Clark, his claws running across his body but only succeeding in destroying his clothes. Long rips appeared across his chest, arms, and pants. Blue showed no signs of stopping, and Clark starkly realised there was blood beginning to appear across his body.

But it wasn't his.

As the patches of blood grew in size, he slowly reached for Blue's hands, stopping his movements entirely.

They were silent, with only the sounds of sharp breaths and lapping water surrounding them. Clark looked at those fingers; saw the long claws that had once been there had all been snapped off upon impact with his skin, leaving the ends of his fingers bloody and raw. It must have hurt, it must have been so painful and yet Blue kept attacking despite knowing it was all fruitless.

Despite knowing there was no point.

"You…" Clark began, his voice trembling. "You knew?" He looked at Blue's face; at those tear filled eyes. "You knew I wasn't human?"

Blue's face slowly morphed. It went from anger, to annoyance to a sadness so profound it had Clark's own eyes watering. He nodded.

"Then…" Clark's mind raced as he looked down at his mutilated clothes. "You… don't want to kill me?"

The tears threatening to spill finally did as Blue shook his head.

"Then why… Why did you drag me down? Why did you do it?" Clark implored. "I thought you were trying to kill me!"

Blue opened his mouth and the pain across his face only grew more pronounced, he made a sound Clark had never heard him make before. It was a wail so gut wrenching that Clark could feel his heart break at the mere sound of it. It was filled with all the agony this situation had brought, all the pain Clark had caused, for no other reason than his own disbelief that this mer could have genuinely loved him.

"Oh, God." Clark let out, his tears finally falling. "Blue, i'm--"

But the rest of his apology never came, Blue fell against him, his head curling against his shoulder as he wept. Clark joined him, releasing an emotion he couldn't even quantify. It was pain, regret and guilt and with each tear he could feel it finally begin to fade. He found it felt good to cry. It felt good to sob like he had as a child and feel each tear swipe away the tar that had been enveloping him for so long.

Eventually the sobbing died down, ushering the return of that pregnant silence. Clark wanted to speak, to voice the apology he wanted to, but one look at Blue told him that his own need for forgiveness would have to wait.

The mer looked wrecked. The blood on his hands had dried, but his nail beds still oozed with it. His wounds from yesterday, even the ones that had appeared mostly healed, had reopened. And then there was the rib.

Clark could see it, the single line across the bone. He wanted to cry as he stared at it, knowing he was the one who caused it.

"I'm sorry for hurting you." Clark murmured against Blue's head.

The mer for the most part didn't respond, letting out only a single huff of breath to show he was not asleep and had heard him. Clark rubbed his hand across his back. "I freaked out." Clark continued, his eyes trained on the water. "This whole time, I thought you were just waiting for me let my guard down. I've heard stories about mers who do that. They trick humans into thinking they love them, and then when they get in the water, they're never seen again. Dragged into the water and killed." He let out a breath and tightened his hold of the mer. "Even after everything we've been through, that's always been a fear of mine. That you don't really love me. That you just want me dead."

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. "I don't know how I can make this up to you, Blue, but I will. I promise."

Blue pulled away at that, his eyes boring into Clark with their intensity. He expected to see anger there, but he didn't. Instead, his face was remarkably calm as he simply pointed to the water.

Clark stared at the hand, at the bloody index finger pointing at the waves. Clark felt his heart race. "You want me to go back in the water?"

A single nod.

Clark opened his mouth, panic gripping him. “I-- I can’t.”

Shock had quelled the panic he should have felt earlier at being pulled down. In a way, it had acted like a safety harness, cushioning his psyche from the onslaught it would have received under normal circumstances. The water was simply something he had grown to avoid. He lived by it, he sailed across it, but there was something about it that still scared him.

A lone eel in the water. Black eyes in the darkness. Sharp teeth snapping shut.

He shuddered at the memory. That must have been it; the reason he hadn’t been back in the water since he was a child. That single memory, now was back with a vengeance. He had thought that was it, but then he wondered; was there something else? Another memory from that time? He thought he had remembered something as Blue pulled him down, but as he tried to recall it, he found the memory had all but completely vanished from his mind, leaving only a half worn idea of one in its place.

He supposed it didn't matter. All he knew was that even now, even with the mind of an adult, that child-like fear was still there, repelling him from the water he used to happily explore.

Even with Blue, even as a man, he couldn’t do it.

He just couldn’t do it.

“I can’t go in the water.” Clark finally managed to say. He chanced a look at Blue, and didn’t miss the frown that appeared on his face as a result. “I know I must sound like the biggest asshole on the whole planet for that, but you need to understand that even though I *can* go in the water with you, mentally, I can’t. I--” he swallowed thickly, looking down at his hands as he could feel them begin to run cold. “I saw something down there when I was a kid, and it’s like… the idea of going in the water, it’s just too much and I can’t do it right now. I’m sorry.”

He looked up at Blue and watched as he took a deep breath and let it out. He didn’t look mad, but that same tight frown he’d had at Clark’s initial refusal was still there. He took another breath, then another, and surprisingly he only nodded. His eyes locked onto Clark’s, and again he only nodded. “Okay?” Clark ventured.

Blue nodded again.

“You won’t…” Clark said. “You won’t make me go in the water?”

He shook his head.

“I--” Clark began, his eyes burning. “Thank you.”

Blue moved close to him then, and instead of curling into him like he had earlier, he instead placed a single kiss on Clark’s forehead before lowering his face and pressing his own onto that same patch of skin. Clark relished the warmth that single action infused him with, and he pressed forward, pressing his lips against Blue’s. “I can’t go into the water, but anything else you want from me, I will do. I will do anything I can to make up for today. I promise.”

Blue huffed at that, his lip curling up at the side as he pulled back and eyed Clark. The look told Clark that there were plenty of things that came to mind that would be adequate, but before Clark could do any of *those* , he had to deal with what he caused.

He carried Blue inside and set him on the bed. Picking up the first aid kit, he firstly went about dealing with all the blood. He cleaned Blue's hands, wiping each finger with care. He then sutured the wounds that had reopened, then finally, he trained his vision on Blue’s chest. “I broke a rib.” Clark said with a frown.

Blue looked down at his own body and brought his hand to brush up against the bone in question. He winced as his finger made contact. Clark reached out and took that hand in his own, rubbing the pad of his thumb against Blue’s palm. “You’re gonna have to take it easy for a while. With a broken rib, I don’t want you swimming too much.”

Blue looked as though he was about to object to that but then changed his mind, grumbling to himself instead. Clark could sympathize. “I know, I know. I really am sorry.”

But Blue only shrugged, laying down against the bed and taking another breath. Clark eyed him for a moment before getting up. “I’ll get us home.”

A chirp and nod was Blue's response, and with that, Clark went to start the boat.

Once home, Clark carried Blue back inside and laid him out on the bed, using his pillow to prop his upper body up. He didn't know much about broken ribs, but he doubted keeping Blue crammed in a tub whilst it healed was a good idea.

In fact, the more he thought about it, the more he realised he should probably figure out how to deal with a broken rib before he ended up making things a Hell of a lot worse.

"You gonna be okay here for a little while?" Clark asked. "I'm gonna go get some stuff for your rib."

Clark doubted Blue would have said no to such a question, and yet he still waited for the mer to nod before making his decision. At that, he quickly changed his clothes, not bothering to put the dirty ones in the hamper. They were well and truly destroyed.

After that, he made his way towards his boat, but as he looked back to the cabin and assessed Blue, he realised there really was no point in upholding his fisherman persona right now. Much like he had when Blue was in pain, he figured time was of the essence, and speed was a necessity.

He flew up from the dock and began heading to Cottonwood, though he veered off course not too long after. Despite having gone to the pharmacy there before, he didn't want to arouse more suspicion by returning and asking about more treatments for his enigmatic partner. He instead flew to Sacramento, and after landing in a quiet alley outside of the city center, he walked the rest of the way into the city proper.

It was busy, despite it being Sunday most people were out and about in droves to the point Clark soon found himself bumping shoulders with more than a couple of people. Thankfully, he didn't have to deal with it for long as he soon found what he was looking for; an unassuming pharmacy. He ducked inside.

As he entered, a small bell rang, and when Clark walked through the aisle to the front counter, he saw a man already stood there waiting. He smiled at Clark, and before Clark even had time to say hello, he was already speaking. "Hi there and welcome to Thompkin's Pharmacy, my name is Allen. How can I help you today?"

“Uh.” Clark looked around the place and made a face. “Yeah… My partner broke their rib, and I was just wondering how best to treat it.”

“Oh.” Allen said, though it was less a sound of suspicion and more of interest. He quickly began pulling items from behind the counter and setting them down. “Honestly, with broken ribs, it’s all about pain management and helping the inflammation. Ibuprofen is a good place to start for both, and ice packs will also help to ease the swelling. It’s important to have them continue to breathe normally, not just shallow breaths, and cough as needed to help clear mucus build up and prevent any nasty chest infections. Last but not least, have their chest be slightly elevated as they sleep. You don’t want them to sleep flat due to the risk of fluid build up. And I know this goes without saying, but you definitely don't want them to do any heavy lifting or strenuous activities whilst their rib heals. Do all that, and that rib should be good as new in six to eight weeks.”

Clark found himself nodding at the words in a daze, and after hearing them all he looked at the ice pack and box of ibuprofen on the counter. He didn’t really need any more of the latter after his trip to Cottonwood, but then again, it was always good to have extra on hand. “Thanks, uh, Allen. How much will all this be?”

After being told the amount that was due, Clark pulled out his wallet. He then heard the door chime ring, as well as the sound of footsteps. As they came to a stop beside him, he found his eyes quickly glancing to the person now there, and as he did, was greeted with a shock of white hair and an eye covered by an eyepatch. "Hey Al." The man said, his voice gravelly yet smooth. "Is Leslie in the back?"

Clark watched the exchange between the two men as he set his money down on the counter. Allen's eyes flicked to Clark as he tried to smile, though it only grew strained as he spoke. "She is, but Slade--"

But 'Slade' didn't wait for the rest of that sentence as he opened the divider door and stepped behind the counter. He then made his way through the doorway marked 'staff only', and it was as he did that Clark saw that he was in fact holding his arm close to his chest.

It was also then that he noticed the small drops of blood on the floor beside him.

As the door shut, Allen cleared his throat and Clark could practically feel the panic radiate off of him in droves. He then handed Clark the bag of supplies as well as his change. "Have a nice day, sir!" He said, far to enthusiastically. "Thank you for shopping at Thompkin's Pharmacy!"

Clark took the hint and quickly left. Once back out onto the street, he debated if there was anything else he should do whilst here. As he walked, he passed a butcher and at that, his question was answered.

Now carrying two bags, Clark returned to the alley he had landed in and quickly made his way home.

Upon landing on the beach, he quickly approached the cabin, opening the door and peaking inside. Blue was still on the bed, his eyes closed as though in sleep, though they quickly opened upon the door creaking open. Clark chanced a smile. “Hey.” He said as he opened the door fully. “How you feeling?”

Blue chirped, heaving a shrug that soon morphed into a wince. Clark came to his side, sitting on the edge of the bed. “You gotta not move too much, remember?” He set the bags down beside him, and almost immediately Blue went to reach for them. Clark however only pulled them both out of his reach. “Medicine first.”

A huff was Blue’s response, as he crossed his arms and sat back, waiting for Clark to do just that. He reached into the bag and took out the box of ibuprofen, popping two out the blister packaging before slipping them into Blue’s mouth and passing him a glass of water.

After that was done, he picked up the ice pack. Though that was not an accurate name for it in its present form. It was simply a pack at the moment, and he needed to place ice cubes inside to change that. He didn’t have a freezer on the island, but he found he never even needed one given what he could do.

And given that Blue apparently already knew he wasn’t human...

Clark leant over the tub of water beside them and blew against the surface. Shards of ice began crystallizing on the surface, and when the shards grew large enough, he stopped. He then reached down and picked up the chunks before slipping them into the pack and passing it over to Blue. “Here. For your rib. Put it where it hurts.”

Blue however was just staring at him.

“Oh, right.” Clark said, feeling mildly embarrassed. “I can sort of do that. Ice breath, I mean.”

Blue's mouth fell open, then quickly snapped shut. He then shook his head, letting out a small breath that turned into a chuckle.

Clark smiled at that. "That surprise you?"

Blue nodded.

"So what *did* you know I could do?" Clark asked playfully, his hand resting on Blue's flank.

Blue thought for a moment, though Clark doubted it was from him trying to remember the answers and more from how best to articulate them. After a moment he brought his arm up and curled it, flexing the muscle there. "Strength." Clark ventured. "Correct." He added.

A nod, then Blue brought his hand straight up above him, moving in languidly from side to side in the air. "Flight." Clark said, feeling somewhat impressed. "Also correct."

Another nod. Then, a gesture Clark recognized from earlier, Blue brought his finger to his arm, scraping it against the skin repeatedly. "Yeah…" Clark muttered. "Invulnerable." He let out a breath as he looked away. Suddenly, their guessing game had lost its fun, and only served to remind Clark of how royally he had screwed up today.

He could only hope to atone for what he had done with his actions, and he had something that he thought might help right beside him. "Okay. I think you can have your surprise now, and I think you'll like what I got…"

Clark reached into the other bag and slipped out the paper packaging. Blue's nose twitched as Clark slowly opened it, and once it was revealed, let out a sharp chirp. "I figured steak wasn't gonna be good enough, so I went with something a bit… bigger."

It was bottom round. The biggest cut of it they had, and open lifting it up, Blue's eyes only grew wider as he tried to reach for it. Clark however, only rolled his eyes and got up. "I gotta sear it first, remember?"

But Blue was insistent, even with the rib, he was trying to sit up and grasp at it. Clark only sighed. “You really want it raw? I thought you liked it when I seared it?”

Blue paused at that, before resuming his grabby hands.

“Alright…” Clark said with a roll of the eyes. He then handed over the hunk of meat. “Here you go, your highness.”

The meat was snatched from Clark’s hands and almost immediately Blue sunk his teeth into it, ripping long strips of it off before swallowing. Clark didn’t even have time to be shocked as he simply took in the sight that was Blue devouring the meat. The butcher had told him it would be enough for a family of four and within minutes it was gone. Gristle and all.

After the last bite slid down his throat, Blue lay back and let out a content sigh as he closed his eyes. Clark however was still rooted in place, staring at the area where the hunk of meat had been. “I really don’t know whether to be impressed or horrified.” He found himself saying.

Blue cracked an eye open at that and smirked.

Clark huffed a laugh at the expression. “I guess I'll go with both.”

He let Blue sleep off his meal as he went about cleaning the place up a little. He’d need to change the sheets-- again. But that would have to be done when Blue wasn’t asleep on them.

Which led to the next question. How the Hell was he going to keep Blue comfortable whilst he healed?

They could share the bed for a few nights, sure, but six weeks straight? He supposed the tub was still an option, but given how hunched Blue would be in it as he slept, he winced at the idea all the same. The spot under the jetty was another, but leaving Blue out in the open for anything or anyone to stumble upon him, especially as he recovered, also didn’t sit right with him.

~~*You could finally do what you were talking about doing, you know. Turn this place from a hole into an actual home for the two of you.*~~

That was true, Clark conceded. He'd been wanting to do this place up for a while now, but that would take months and he didn't have that sort of time right now.

A pool? That could work. He had plenty of land to dig something adequate out, and if it was only a temporary thing, it didn't matter if it didn't look the best.

So that was what he did whilst Blue slept. He went behind the cabin and found his shovel before making his way a bit further out towards the tree line. He then stuck the tool into the land and got to work.

Superspeed helped to hasten the process. He dug into the earth and flung it to the side in quick bursts and before long he had a square ditch of dirt about ten feet squared. It wasn't that deep, two foot at most, but Clark wanted to make sure Blue could get himself out of it with minimal strain on his body and figured this was a good enough depth for that.

He then went about sealing the poool. The last thing he needed after all was to fill it with water and come back tomorrow to find it had all seeped out. He had brought some sealant years back when he was first building the cabin, intent on using it to create a large outdoor water collector. In the end, he gave up when he found that metal tubs worked just as well. He still kept the sealant though, and now he was thankful he did.

After smoothing the edges of the pool, he covered it with the sealant and then went about filling the whole thing with water. He grabbed his bathtub from inside and after a number of trips back and forth between the shore; the pool was finally done.

Clark allowed himself to be somewhat impressed with his handiwork. It could have looked better, sure, but it also could have been way worse, so Clark chalked it up as a win.

He returned to the cabin then, and upon entering this time, Blue cracked an eye open in his direction. "I did something while you were sleeping." Clark said.

A curious chirp was Blue's response, and after rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Clark scooped him into his arms and walked outside. "I figured the tub wasn't that comfortable for you, and the bed

might be a bit cramped with the two of us, so…" he walked behind the cabin and upon reaching the pool, set Blue down beside it. "Tada."

Blue let out a chirp as he stared at the water. He looked confused, but after raising a brow, he lifted his hand up and turned to Clark. Using his index and middle finger, he wiggled them backwards and forwards quickly before pointing at Clark and then the water. Clark took in the gesture and nodded. "Oh yeah. Superspeed. I can do that, too."

Blue's eyes blew wide before he eventually huffed and slipped into the water. It wasn't big enough for him to swim around inside of it, but for sleeping or soaking, it was more than adequate. After a moment, he poked his head out from the surface and watched Clark.

Clark sat down at the side and dangled his feet in. "Well? Is it okay? It's only temporary. I'm gonna see about getting this place done up properly and getting you a nice big pool, but until then, you gonna be okay in here?"

Blue was quiet as he looked around the pool. He ducked under again and this time seemed to prowl around the bottom of the pond. After a few minutes, he poked his head back out and nodded. Then he chirped, and reached for Clark's calf, tugging on it.

Clark stared at that hand and tilted his head. "You… want me to get in?" He asked.

Blue nodded.

Clark stared at the water, and after getting over the initial burst of anxiety, he told himself this was okay. This wasn't the ocean. This was a pool in his backyard. *Blue isn't going to drag you down again.* "Alright... But just for a little while."

Blue beamed at that and Clark slipped off the edge and sat down in the water, his head and shoulders just above the surface.

Almost immediately, Blue moved towards him, ducking under the water once more and laying down, resting his head in Clark's lap. Clark looked down through the water at Blue's eyes looking back at him.

'A little while' turned into a few hours, but as Clark sat back and stroked Blue's head as the mer slept, he found he didn't mind one bit.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone after last chapter: Oh yay! Clark knows Blue loves him and they're finally gonna swim together!

Me: :)

...You didn't think it would be that easy, did you?

Hahaha, anyway, these next few chapters are coming a lot quicker to me than the previous ones 'cause it's like my brain is like 'yay! We can write about all the cool shit you've been building up to!' and i'm sat here smashing my keyboard 'cause I'm so exited for you guys to read what I have planned. It's alot.

As always, let me know your thoughts! I love reading all your lovely comments and I will catch you all next time. Bye! :D

Chapter 27

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 30th 2016

The next few days were spent trying to make amends.

Which of course was made harder by virtue of Blue getting sunburnt.

Clark probably should have figured out the reason Blue slept *under* the jetty was that it blocked most of the light during the day. His pool on the other hand, only received shade for a few hours in the morning, with the rest of the time spent under the sun's hot rays.

Which was how Blue ended up tinged pink and grumbling by the time he crawled into the cabin late one evening. After seeing that, Clark managed to find a dark tarp to cover the pool with, leaving a foot long strip at one side for Blue to get in and out from. It worked, and with the pool now covered and with Blue's sunburn now fading, Clark was left to dwell on the major fault in their relationship that had caused the issue in the first place.

Namely, communication.

He couldn't imagine how he and Lois would have coped had they not been able to communicate effectively with one another. Blue for the most part could apparently understand what he was told, but Clark still struggled immensely. Whilst he had come to understand a few of Blue's gestures, he hasn't been able to pick up on the whole, 'i'm going to cook alive unless you cover my pool, you unimaginable moron,' tangent that he had been given after the mers first day out in the pool. No, it wasn't until a few days later, when Blue appeared before him red faced and grouchy, that Clark finally understood what the mer had been going on about.

Which was what led Clark to his plans for today.

The library on Cottonwood was small. Some might even be reluctant to call it a library, but it had books and a lone librarian who didn't ask questions, so for Clark's purposes, it was indeed one. They had books on a whole number of topics, but the ones Clark was interested in were on an unassuming shelf near the back, according to said librarian.

He perused the shelves then grabbed every book he could find that might contain what he was after. Once laden, he carried them to the nearby table, fanning them all out and poring over their covers.

Mer biology. Mer physiology. Mer behaviour. If the book had the word 'mer' in the title, they were now before Clark.

After a quick glance towards the sole other occupant of the library; the librarian who was far more interested in his own book than paying attention to him, Clark took it upon himself to read through the books before him.

And promptly become disappointed.

For the most part, all the books covered the same basic themes, going over information that even Clark with his basic level of mer knowledge knew. He knew Cottonwood wasn't going to have specialist books, but considering Clark didn't know what places did, he had hoped to get somewhat lucky here. He had thought perhaps one of the books delved into the topic of human mer communications, but no, aside from a section talking about voice mimicry, there was nothing.

Even as he grew more disheartened, he still made his way through the entire pile, hoping at least one book might have something. But none did. Once finished, he set them back on the shelf and went to make his way out of the library before pausing at another shelf. The spine of a single book stuck out to Clark and he found himself reaching for it.

He looked at the cover and read the words 'American Sign Language.' He flipped it open and after glancing at a few of the pages thought it was easy enough to understand. He carried it over to the librarian, who after creating a new account for Clark and handing him a library card, passed him the book and promptly turned his attention back to his own.

As Clark stepped outside, book in hand, he looked up at the sky. It was already getting late, so he didn't waste anymore time by dawdling. He hurried back to the dock, barely paying attention to the people he passed. He only stopped upon hearing someone call his name.

“Clark!”

He turned to the source of the voice and spotted Porter standing in the doorway of the shipping office, keys in hand as he locked up for the night. He sent a warm smile Clark’s way as he pocketed the keys and approached. “I thought that was you,” he continued as he came to a stop before him. “How have you been?”

Clark pondered the question, his face growing thoughtful as he looked down at the book in his hands. Upon thinking about how best to answer, he found there wasn’t one available that didn’t lead to an hours long digression over his countless failings as a partner, so instead, he heaved a sigh and turned back to Porter. “I’ve been better.”

“Oh.” The man said, his eyebrows raising. “Anything I can help with?”

“No, it’s just--" Clark cut himself with a shake of the head. “Something I have to figure out on my own, I guess.”

Porter’s gaze grew sympathetic as he took in Clark's less than cheery demeanor, and after a few quick glances around the dock, he leant forward. “I know it’s not much coming from an old codger like me, but if you ever needed an ear to talk to, I have two of them.”

Clark couldn’t help the huff of laughter he let out at the joke. “Thanks but… It’s uh...” Clark pursed his lips together as he tried to come up with the rest of the sentence. It was however during this time that he actually took stock of Porter’s offer, and what’s more, realised he might actually be able to help him. “You know what, you’re actually probably *exactly* who I need to speak to.”

“I am?” Porter looked somewhat surprised with that, but he still beamed all the same. “Well then, what can I help you with?”

Clark eyed the man before him, his head tilting up in question. “How do you communicate with Yana?”

At the exact moment the question left his lips, Porter's hand darted out and covered Clark’s mouth. He looked around the dock fervently, and whilst Clark wanted to say there was no one else around, he

couldn’t exactly do that with the hand currently over his lips. “You can’t just say things like that out in public, Clark.” Porter whispered, his eyes wide with panic. “People might hear you.”

He lowered his hand, and as he did, Clark looked around them both. “We’re alone.” He said, a strange feeling of deja vu hitting him.

“You can’t guarantee that.” Porter still whispered.

“No, no.” Clark said with a nod. “I can.”

Porter looked less than impressed, but didn’t argue. He instead pulled his coat together and started to leave the marina. When Clark didn’t follow immediately, he paused under the archway and beckoned him forward. “Come on now. We can talk at my house.”

The walk over to Porter's home was a quiet one. The August sky was still tinged blue even though early evening had now turned into evening. They were the only ones still out, with the highstreet now closed and with almost all of its residents now in their homes. Clark kept pace with Porter and at the end of the street, they came to the development site that Clark was beginning to know all too well. They turned onto a smaller side street, and after a few more minutes of walking came across a modest bungalow nestled right beside the construction site.

“Jeez.” Clark said, eyeing the machinery not even twenty feet away from the place. “Does that not get annoying?”

“It's not too bad, in actuality.” Porter waved his hand towards the place. “Sure it can be loud, but Walter’s been good about only working during social hours. By the time I get home, they’re all usually packed up for the day.” He let out a little sigh as he turned back towards Clark. “If anything, what I'm actually nervous for are the new neighbours.”

Clark raised a brow. “You mean Selina?”

“Oh no." Porter said, approaching his doorway and picking his large chain of keys back out of his pocket and rifling through them. “I’ve met her and her boys. They’re lovely folks, but there is another

property being planned along with hers. Walter doesn't have a buyer for it yet, and I suppose I'm just worried about who exactly that neighbour will be when he has."

Clark could somewhat sympathise. He remembers a time in his old life where things like new neighbours were a concern for him. It was just that now, given what he has gone through since, unruly neighbours have become somewhat trivial in comparison. He didn't say as much to Porter as he followed him through the threshold though, that was a whole can of worms he'd rather avoid spilling.

As he stepped inside, Clark's first thought was surprise. Which, upon a moment's thought, he questioned. He supposed he just hadn't given much thought into the kind of home Porter would have, but the cozy living room he stepped into, was not it. There were warm looking sofas, as well as a worn fireplace. Trinkets and oddities lined the walls and shelves around the room and Clark found himself looking at them as Porter took off his coat. "Do make yourself comfortable." He said as he hung his coat on the rack. "I'll go make us some coffee."

Porter left out of the open doorway nearby, brushing through the hanging beads that acted as a separator. Clark began to walk around the room taking in the picture frames as well as trinkets, and upon spying one his mouth fell open. He lifted the photo frame up, taking the sight of it in.

The photo was faded, but he could still make it out clearly. He saw what appeared to be a younger Porter as well as who he knew to be Salvator. There was another man in the frame as well as a woman he also recognized, and when Clark heard footsteps approaching, he turned to Porter. "You knew Marcos' mom?"

"Who, Bianca?" Porter came up beside Clark and peered at the photo too, a smile touching his lips. "Oh yeah, that's one of all of us. Before she and Sal got married--" he readjusted the tray he was holding in his hands and with one hand now free, pointed at all of the people in the photo, one by one. "That's Sal, that's me, that's Bianca and that's Tom."

Clark looked at the photo. "It's a nice photo," he said softly.

"Yeah…" Porter said wistfully. "Wish I had more of us. That's something that will only hit you when you get old, not taking enough photos." He sat on the sofa, setting the tray down and inviting Clark to sit beside him. "Don't let anyone tell you that taking photo's ruins the moment. Fact is when you're old, you won't be able to remember the moments without them."

Clark thought of the lone photo frame in his own home. It was the only one he had of his parents and Lois together. At the time, he thought he'd have years to be able to take more, but a heart attack and car accident later, here he was, with only one photo of his family to show for all that time. He went to reach for the coffee cup offered to him but found his hands were shaking. He promptly shoved them under his thighs. *This is not the time to be thinking about that.*

Porter raised a brow at Clark, his eyes darting to his covered hands before ignoring him in favour of adding sugar to his own cup. "Let me know if you need more creamer or sugar. I like mine pretty sweet, personally."

"Black's fine." Clark managed to say, only having to clear his throat once.

Porter nodded, sliding the other mug closer to Clark, as if the reason for not taking was due to it being too far away. At the gesture, Clark slid his hands back out from his thighs and reached for it, glad that the shaking had subsided somewhat. He brought the cup to his lips and took a sip, letting out an appreciative hum. "That's good."

"Thank you." Porter said with a humble nod. "I'm not very good at much, but I take pride in my coffee."

Clark let out another hum, taking a longer sip of it before bringing the cup down and staring at the near black surface. He turned to Porter, and even though he wasn't looking at him, Clark could feel he had his attention. "So," he began, bringing his finger to the rim of the mug. "Now that we're somewhere private…"

"Right." Porter said, taking another sip of coffee. "You're question, it's…" he pursed his lips. "It's difficult to answer."

"How so?"

"Because…" Porter began, wincing as though in pain. "I've been told to never talk about it to anyone."

Clark made a face at that. "Porter, *you* know I'm with a mer, *I* know you're with a mer, why can't we talk about this?"

Porter's expression only grew more pained. “There is more to this than you know, and you need to understand, I've been told ever since I was a little kid to never talk to anybody about this unless I know that they're...” he trailed off, and only after a few moments of silence did he continue. “One of us.”

“One of…?” Clark muttered to himself, his confusion evident. “What do you mean by that?”

“How much do you love your mer?” Porter asked, and Clark felt blindsided by the question, so much so that he recoiled.

“I--” he let out, and at Porter's serious gaze, he felt the rest of the words pour out of his mouth. “I love him.”

“Him?” Porter asked, mused. “I thought they were ‘*it’s* ’.”

“Him.” Clark repeated firmly. “I love *him* more than you could know.”

Porter nodded slowly, and after a deep breath he let out a small laugh. “I did wonder about you, you know. It’s rare for a human to fall in love with a mer. Most end up dying before the love really has a chance to settle in."

“But--” Clark began and Porter only raised a hand at him

“Oh me? I'm not human.” Porter said with a quick shake of the head.

Clark’s eyes blew wide at that and Porter took another sip of coffee. “I’m a mernan. My grandmother was a Pavos fin, which means I have mer blood.” Porter jerked his head towards the closed door that led off from the living room. “Yana is a Pavos Algas half breed, do you--" Porter looked nervous as he turned back to Clark. “Do you wanna meet her?”

Clark raised his brows, and not trusting his voice, only nodded. Porter set his now empty cup down and Clark did the same before following the man to the doorway. There was a number lock on it, and after typing in the code, Porter opened the door to reveal what was inside.

Clark let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding as he took in the room. It was larger than he had been expecting and there was little floor space with most of the area consisting of a large rectangular pool. There was a small bed to the side of the room, right beside the edge, and as Clark walked further inside he saw that the pool was deeper than he thought it would be, and that there was sand and other plant life all along the bottom.

He also spied someone lounging at the bottom of it. "Is that...?"

"Yana?" Porter smiled. "Yeah, she'll come up in a little bit. Take her a minute to move."

"Yeah?"

Porter hummed once. "Broken tail."

"Oh." Clark said, his eyes blowing wide. "When did…?" He began to ask, before trailing off at the sight of the mer climbing up the side of the pool by the handrails embedded on the side.

"It happen?" Porter finished for him as he walked over to the edge and sat down by it, dangling his feet in. "About a year ago. It's sort of how we met."

As he finished the words a head poked out of the water, and Clark took in sight of the mer. Her ears were a bright blue and twitched from side to side as she stared at Clark. She then turned to Porter, letting out a chirp to which Porter only cooed. He set his hand on her head. "He's a friend, Yana. You remember when I told you about Elyss? He's the one who got her down."

Yana's eyes blew wide, and Clark couldn't help but swallow back surprise as she pushed herself out of the tub with which Clark could now see were very muscular arms. She approached him, the end of her tail limp as she did and it was then that Clark noticed that the colour of it was different from her ears, with the end tapering off into a seaweed green colour. As she stopped before him, her eyes were wide as she chirped up at Clark.

“Uh.” He let out as he looked at Porter.

“She says thank you. Elyss was a good friend of hers, and you taking her down shows you’re a good man. She only wishes she could have seen her off properly.”

“Seen her off?” Clark asked, looking at the mer with a raised brow.

“It's how mers send off their dead; the mer equivalent of a funeral, if you will. They pierce their gills and lungs with their teeth and claws, and then they bring them to the bottom of the ocean and lay them to rest down there. The mer’s body then feeds all of the creatures roaming the bottom, becoming a part of the cycle of life.”

“Pierce their…?” Clark asked more to himself. At the words, a memory came back to him, transporting him to another time and place entirely. He could see it now, the sight of Elyss floating in the water before him.

The mer simply glared at him, not moving away. It pulled in close to her neck and bit down on her throat. In the same movement, it slid one of its long claws deep between her ribs.

“My mer…” Clark began looking down at Yana. “My mer did that for Elyss. At the time I thought he was trying to eat her, but he bit down on her neck, and--” he brought his own finger to his ribs, pressing it between them. “Pierced her right there before taking her down into the water.”

Porter and Yana’s eyes grew wide and Clark himself found he was still lost in the memory. So much had happened since then, so much had changed, and here he was, remembering that day like it was yesterday.

He was soon pulled from his reverie by a sound, and when he looked down, he saw what it was. Yana was crying; fat tears rolling down her face as she wailed. Porter crawled from the edge of the pool towards her, offering quiet condolences as he did. “Oh, Yana, honey... It’s okay.”

But Yana didn’t stop, though she did turn to Porter, curling into his neck as she sobbed. Porter looked up at Clark then, his own face slick with tears. “You have no idea how much that means to us. Thank you, Clark. Thank you for telling us.” Porter turned his attention back to Yana then, smoothing down her hair as he held onto her.

As Clark stood there, he realised he didn't know what to say. He felt like he was intruding, and as the seconds creeped by, that thought only grew. He cleared his throat and stepped back. "I'm gonna, just, wait out… here… for a little…" he let the sentence die when he found he wasn't being listened to, and his relief at that realisation was immense.

He quickly opened the door and walked back out into the living room, letting out a deep sigh as he did. He then went over to the sofa and fell back against it.

He drank the rest of his coffee, and waited for Porter to come back out. That ended up taking longer than Clark anticipated, and given that he had been on the island for a few hours already, he hoped Porter wouldn't mind if he used the restroom whilst he waited.

By the time he came back out, Porter looked to be getting up from the floor and Yana was slipping back into her pool. Clark sat back down on the sofa, and was already facing the door as Porter opened it. His face and eyes were red, but there was a smile on his face now.

Clark thought of what to say, something that would hopefully get Porter's mind away from whatever he must have just been thinking of in there, and as he closed the door, Clark offered, "you said something in there."

"Oh?" Porter asked as he walked over.

"About her tail, about that being how you two met."

"Oh right." Porter said, setting himself back down on the sofa with a sigh. "Yeah, me and Tom used to go fishing back before he… you know…" Porter grew quiet before continuing. "And well, on one such trip, we were cruising along and all of a sudden I felt a bump. I rushed to the side of the boat and saw two mers in the water, one looked in a bad way and the other was yelling at the two of us. Tom looked all spooked and I asked why and he got all quiet on me, then I heard Yana start talking, start saying everything hurt and well--" Porter let out a sigh. "That's when me and Tom found out each other were mernans. He was part Algas; great grandfather, dad's side, and I'm part Pavos; grandmother, dad's side."

Clark frowned. "How did you not already know that about each other?"

Porter only let out another sigh. “It’s like I told you right at the start, Clark, you take being a mernan to your *grave* . You only trust people that you know for a fact are kin, and I didn’t know Tom was kin, you can only sync with your own species, after all. You gotta imagine it like, like--” he went quiet as he thought and then after a moment he went on. “Like radio frequencies. Every single species of mer has a different frequency, so you can *only* sync with mers with the same frequency. As Yana is a mix, she can sync with Algas and Pavos mers, but Elyss could only sync with Algas ones. It's why mer pods and communities always consist of the same species, they physically cannot sync with mers of a different species.”

“Huh.” Clark let out as he poured over the words. “So what happened to Yana and Elyss’ pod?”

“They’re still out there somewhere.” Porter said with a nod. “But the thing is, after Yana’s tail broke, she couldn’t swim anymore, and you can imagine for a mer that's a death sentence, so after me and Tom got over the shock of the situation, I told Yana I’d take her back to land until she was healed. At the time we thought maybe she’d be able to swim again, but that didn’t happen, of course. Elyss was having none of it, though. She didn't want me taking Yana anywhere, so Tom told her she could stay with him as we lived next to each other and he’d happily bring her to my place whenever she wanted.”

“After that we realized we actually needed to make suitable accommodation for them both to stay in and after digging and filling both of the pools, we bought Yana and Elyss inside. Once Yana’s tail was healed and we realised she couldn’t swim anymore, me and Tom would take them out every day to stretch their fins and talk to one another, but…” he took a deep breath. “After Tom and Elyss died, I told Yana I don't want her out in the water when I'm not there to keep an eye on her. So during the day when I'm at work, she sleeps, and then I take her out for a night swim when I get back. Though we still have to be careful, even at night. I see the Kyle’s come out onto the beach wherever they’re visiting the property, so I've taken to bringing Yana out in a little boat as a sort of disguise. I sit in it while she paddles around and then I bring her back in after a few hours. I hope it just looks like I'm going for a little nightly fish, but...” Porter grimaced.

“Is that why you’re nervous about having new neighbours?" Clark asked, bringing his arm out to rest along the back of the sofa.

“God yes.” Porter said with a heavy sigh. “The Kyle’s are a lot further down the beach, but this other house will be right next door. With Tom it didn't matter how brazen I was about bringing Yana to the water, but if these new neighbours are anything like Antonio--” he shivered, unable to finish the sentence.

Clark brought his hand down, and rested it on Porter's shoulder. “Porter. This is Walter we’re talking about. I doubt that place is shifting anytime soon. You know, unless someone wins the lottery and fancys moving here.”

Porter smiled at that. “True, if things go well, that place will remain unsold for years to come.”

“Here here." Clark said with a solemn nod.

Porter let out a hearty laugh as he fell back against the sofa. After a few moments he let out a sigh, and Clark didn't miss the fond look he sent his way. “I know I was a bit hesitant at first but i'm glad I spoke to you, Clark. After Tom passed, it was like I lost a brother. Talking to you though, it just makes me not feel as alone anymore.”

Clark felt his cheeks warm at the sentiment, and he looked away. “Yeah, talking to you has been… good. Thanks for telling me about all this stuff. Porter. I know it wasn’t easy.”

“You’re welcome, and hey, now you know about syncing you and your mer should have no problems communicating.” Porter smiled.

Clark opened his mouth to that, before snapping it shut. “But... I'm not part mer.”

“You must be." Porter said easily. "Mers can sense that about people. Fact is your mer wouldn’t have stuck around like he has unless he *knew* he could talk to you.”

“Porter, I can tell you with absolute certainty, I have no mer blood in me whatsoever.”

Porter’s expression grew thoughtful at that, and he raised a brow at Clark after a moment. “Has he ever *tried* to sync with you?”

“I don't know… maybe? I don’t even know what that would look like.” Clark offered with a shrug.

“Let me rephrase. Has he ever pressed his forehead against yours, right--” he brought his hand up and pressed his index finger against Clark’s own forehead. “Here.”

Clark thought for a moment, and as he did--

“Uh.” Clark said, tilting his head. “Was that meant to do something?”

The mer slapped him on the forehead again, and this time Clark let out a gasp. “Hey!” Clark barked. “Don’t hit me!”

Clark’s eyes blew wide. “Yeah…” he murmured. “Yeah, he has.”

“So he *tried* to activate your sync, and it didn’t work...” Porter made a face at that. After a while he spoke, “then I don't know what to suggest.”

Clark frowned. “Wonderful.”

“I'm sorry, Clark. I’ve just never heard of this happening before. The fact is your mer would have tried to eat or kill you the minute it knew you weren’t kin, but he didn’t, so that must mean something, I just can’t tell you what.”

“This just keeps getting better and better…” Clark muttered.

Porter at least had the decency to look apologetic. “I really am sorry, Clark. Even Yana is at a loss about that.”

“How would she know?” Clark frowned, looking at the closed door. “She’s not even in the room.”

“I told you.” Porter said, and when Clark’s expression remained a confused frown, he tapped his forehead. “Me and Yana are syncing right now, it's how I can hear her. She speaks… I guess you can call it telepathically, but it's like I was saying to you about the radio signals. She gives off these signals that I can understand and I talk back to her the same way, or verbally, either way she

understands me because of the sync. Distance affects it of course, if i was at the office I wouldn't be able to talk to her, per say, but if she was in danger, it's almost like a distress signal goes out and I can tell she needs me. So yeah, she hears what I'm thinking or saying, and I hear what she's thinking in return. That is what syncing is."

"That sounds--" Clark's eyes blew wide. "I had no idea... So mers *can* talk, they don't just scream and chirp? They actually speak?"

Porter nodded. "Oh yeah, mers talk just like we do, but it's just like I said, it's all telepathic. Half fins on the other hand, *can* talk which is why there are so many scientific accounts of mers being able to 'mimic' human speech."

Clark felt like his head was about to explode. "*Half fins* ?" He asked, his exasperation evident.

"Different than half breeds. Half fins are half mer half humans, but the other way to mernans. So they have tails and gills, but can talk like humans."

"Jesus." Clark said, rubbing his face. He hadn't expected this today. Even when he had gone to the library to study, he hadn't expected the wealth of information he now had in his possession. It was all getting to be too much.

"If you want, we can call it there. I don't exactly want you to get overwhelmed with this stuff."

"But that's the thing, I'm finding out all this shit, and it's like--" Clark clasped his hands together, staring at his own interlocked fingers. "I still feel so helpless. You're saying that no matter what I do, me and Blue will *never* be able to talk to one another? Because I'm--" he faltered. "Human, and he's a mer?"

Porter's expression grew pained. "Afraid so," but as he said the words, his expression grew thoughtful, his eyes going to the doorway that Yana resided behind. "Uh," he let out as his expression grew more focused. After a few minutes of silence, Porter turned back to him. "Okay, bare with me a second, Yana said a lot…" he closed his eyes and then spoke, "she says that there are stories of certain mers who can stimulate a human brain so that they *can* sync with mers, but no mer that Yana knew actually knew how to do it. It's like an old legend amongst mers, something that most think has been lost to time; not done since the era where humans and mers first began to roam the planet." He looked

at Clark then, his eyes bright. “She thinks that maybe, your mer *tried* to do it to you, but for some reason, it didn’t work.”

“Right.” Clark let out, falling back against the couch. “That still doesn’t help me now, though.”

“I know, but, I guess it's nice that he tried and even when he failed, still chose to stay with you.”

Clark felt his cheeks go pink at that. “Yeah… he’s…” he looked away. “He’s great.”

Porter smiled at that. “I bet he is. Maybe one day he and Yana can meet, if he sent Elyss off, I know she’d like to meet him.” Porter paused at that. “Unless, I mean, he is an Algas fin, right? If he sent Elyss off, I just assumed he must be an Algas.”

“He’s not, he’s…” Clark pursed his lips. Given Elijah's preference for the species, he was reluctant for more people than necessary to know about Blue, but as he sat on Porters’ couch, drinking his coffee, talking to him about something he was told to never speak to anyone he couldn't trust about, Clark realised he trusted Porter more than he first realised. “He’s a Black fin.”

“A--” Porter began, his eyes growing wide. All at once, that expression became all the more serious. “Does Dr. Hadal know that?”

Clark pursed his lips. “You know the doc too, huh?”

Porter grimaced. “More than I care to admit. He’s bad news, Clark. Never let him get near your mer.”

Clark opened his mouth to dispute him, but found even if he wanted to, he really couldn’t. “He tell you about his weird Black fin fixation too, huh?”

Porter rolled his eyes. “Of course, he never shuts up about them. Every time he visits the island, he drops by the shipping office to chat. Don’t get me wrong, he knows his stuff, but the way he talks about mers…” he shook his head. “It's not right. You can tell he’s not a mernan, he’s just a human with an obsession.”

“Right.” Clark said as he thought about Porter's words. “Is that common then? For humans to be interested in mers?”

Porter laughed. “It’s *only* humans who are. Mernans aren't exactly eager to out themselves as such by revealing information that only a mernan would know. We just get on with life, let the humans do their own thing, and hey, it’s the best way to keep the mers safe.” He looked down at his hands. “Fact is, if word about how mers communicated and lived got out, humans would manipulate and exploit it in a heartbeat.” He looked up at Clark then, wincing. “No offence.”

“None taken.” Clark said with absolute honesty.

He smiled at that, and heaved a sigh as he fell back against the sofa. “As I was saying, I'll take being a mernan to my grave. If it risks Yana, her family, her whole species, I’m not gonna do it.” He eyed Clark then, his eyes narrowing. “And I trust you’ll do the same.”

“Of course.” Clark said with a nod. “Not like I have anyone else to talk to about this.”

“I know that feeling.” Porter said with a sigh. “That was what was great about Tom… We’d talk about this sort of thing for hours. It used to just be family you could talk to about this stuff, but after both our parents passed it became impossible, but it was okay, ‘cause we had each other, you know?”

“Can you not… meet other mernans?” Clark asked. “I mean, it’s like you said, right? You just ‘sync’ with one another and hey presto, you got a new friend.”

Porter made a face. “Sort of. If their sync’s not active, then no.”

“Active?”

“You’re not born able to sync, you need a parent or a sibling, or a friend to sort of… Awaken it, as it were.” Porter pointed at his forehead. “When I was a baby, my dad pressed me up against his forehead, or so I'm told, so I've been able to sync since then. Some parents never awaken their kids' sync's, or do it when they’re much older, fearing what it might lead to if they do it too young. My dad

wasn’t like that, sure he didn’t want my mom knowing he and I were part mer, but he never wanted to deny his heritage, so he used to say syncing was ‘our little secret’ and to never let mom know that we did it.”

“Was that not hard? Hiding that from her.”

“At times, sure. But it’s like any white lie you keep from your parents, you do it for their sake, just as much as your own. I think near the end she suspected, but she never once called us out on it.” Porter shook his head at the thought, before looking back to Clark. “But back to what I was saying, even if their sync *was* active, I wouldn’t even know what to say to them. Some people are embarrassed to be mernans, some deny it even if you sync with them. From my experience, it’s best to just leave people alone unless I know for a fact I can trust them.”

Clark raised a brow. “So no one else on the island is a mernan?”

“Oh no, I'm fairly certain there are a few of us but it’s not the kind of thing you go asking about unless you are a hundred percent certain you’re right. I can only sense other Pavos mernans personally, so if there were say, an Algas mernan somewhere on the island, I wouldn't know.” Porter said. “I mean, there *is* someone I know who is kin, but he’d deny it point blank if you brought it up to him.”

Clark couldn’t help it. “Who?” He asked.

Porter looked around then, as if there was someone in this very room aside from them who might hear the next words spoken. After confirming they were indeed alone, Porter spoke. “Steve Woodall.” At Clark’s raised brow, he went on. “You know him from Antonio's little posse. He must have a Pavos fin somewhere in him ‘cause the first time we met, we started syncing.”

Clark’s eyes blew wide. “No way.”

“Yup.” Porter nodded. “Not that you’d know it from the way he acts. Like I said, some mernans are fiercely in denial about being one, even going as far as to kill and hunt mers as if it's the *only* way to prove to others that they’re really human. They just don’t wanna believe that they’re part mer, much less directly related to one, so they tell themselves the voices they hear in their minds are the mers ‘playing tricks on them.’ That they’re using telepathy ‘to try and control them.’” Porter rolled his

eyes. “It’s all nonsense of course. Fact is, any person you’ve ever heard say they feel the mers trying to control their minds, are inadvertently telling you they're a mernan.”

“No shit.” Clark muttered.

The following silence that came was a welcome one. It didn’t feel awkward, simply the natural progression of a conversation after so much had been said. After a few minutes of it, Porter reached for the tray of coffee and stood up, walking to the kitchen and setting it down. He returned to Clark then, sizing him up as he placed his hands in his pockets. “You alright?”

“Yeah.” Clark said, surprised how husky his voice sounded. “Still just taking it all in.”

“You can stay for a little while longer if you want.” Porter jerked his hand to the locked door. “But I gotta take Yana out.”

“Oh no, i’ll go.” Clark reached for the book beside him and stood. “Thanks for having me, Porter.”

He received a languid hand wave at that. “Don’t mention it, in fact, I want you to know anytime you have any questions you can come to me. Even if I don't know the answer, Yana might." He was quiet for a moment, his eyes darting to the door that held said mer behind it. "She also says that even if your mer and her won’t be able to talk, she still wants to meet him.”

Clark smiled at that. “Sounds like a plan.”

He left not long after, walking back through town to the docks. On the trip back to his island, he flipped open the book once more and skimmed through it. If Porter was correct about he and Blue apparently never being able to talk, Clark was somewhat happy he had the foresight to prepare for that possibility. The book wouldn't solve all of their problems, sure, but he hoped it would get pretty damn close.

He hopped off the boat and walked towards, then past, his cabin. He approached Blue’s pool and found him inside. He pulled the tarp up slightly to peak in. “Hey, B.”

From underneath the water, Blue gave a low call that sounded so little like the screams and chirps he was known for. They of course returned the moment he poked his head up and out of the water and squawked at Clark.

At his curious expression, Clark went on. “I got something for us.” He said. Blue’s ears perked up and Clark only shook his head at the sight. “It’s not edible.”

At that, Blue’s ears went down and he slipped back into the water. Clark sighed and set the book down, using his hand to reach into the water to try and grab the retreating mer. He found his arm and slowly pulled him back up to the surface. “God damn, would you at least *listen* to what it is before you act like you don’t care?”

Blue made a face, but this time, remained where he was, waiting for Clark to show what was beside him. He picked up the book and opened it. “It’s a book. More importantly though, it's a book about sign language. You know what sign language is?”

Blue raised a brow at that, and gave a slow nod, though he seemed only half committed to it.

“Its a way for people who are deaf or can’t speak to talk. You use hand gestures.” Clark opened the book to a random page, and upon seeing what was written on the one he landed on, felt his cheeks turn pink. Despite it, he still followed the directions written on it; he put up his thumb, index and pinky finger, while keeping his ring finger and his middle finger down. He held his hand out, facing his palm towards Blue and moved it back and forth slightly. “This means, ‘I love you.’” He said, before clearing his throat.

Blue’s eyes blew wide as he came further out of the pool and scanned the page. He didn’t however keep it on the one Clark had chosen and instead started to flip through it, after a moment he took the book in his hands and scanning the page, a grin growing on his face as he did. He set the book down and pointed at Clark, before bringing his hand up and fanning it towards his face. Clark frowned and looked at the book beside him, reading the word ‘smell’ at the top.

Clark eyed the mer. “Really? The first thing you’ve ever said to me, and you wanted it to be saying I smelt?”

Blue only nodded.

“You’re such an asshole...” Clark muttered as he reached for the book, he flicked through it and found what he was looking for. He set it down and pointed a finger at Blue, then curled his index finger and thumb into a circle. “That means you’re an asshole, by the way.”

Blue repeated the gesture.

“Oh *that* one you repeat?” Clark blustered. He crossed his arms and shook his head. “Little shit.”

Blue smiled then, and as Clark sat and steamed he moved his hands again, though this time he pointed his thumb, index and pinky up and waved his hand from side to side, his palm facing outwards. Clark looked at the movement, and fought the blush threatening to come out on his face. He cleared his throat and looked away. “I’m still mad at you..”

Blue reached for the book again, and flicked through it once more. He came across what he was looking for apparently as he set it down and moved his hands. He curled his hand into a fist and circled it around his chest. Clark leant over to look at the page and saw the words 'I'm sorry’ at the top.

Clark’s face only grew redder. “It’s okay.” He couldn't help it. He came forward and pressed a kiss against Blue’s forehead. “I forgive you.”

Blue nodded then, and Clark found himself rolling his eyes as the mer repeated his earlier gesture and fanned his hand by his nose. “Alright alright, I get it.” Clark muttered. “*Asshole*.”

Blue grinned and reached for the book, and Clark couldn't help but watch as he did. The mer's eyes trailed across the words and as Clark watched, he tilted his head to the side. “I didn’t know you could read.” Clark said. “Can most mers read?”

The mer looked up from the book then, and after flipping to another page, he set it down and sliced his hand across the palm of the other. Clark looked at the page. ‘Some’ was the word at the top.

“So some can?” Clark asked, and at Blue’s nod, he nodded in return. “Interesting.”

The rest of the night was spent learning a smattering of phrases and words, most if not all being some form of insult (honestly, Clark should have ripped out the page that had 'fuck you' written on it, as after learning it, Blue spent a whole thirty minutes holding both middle fingers up at Clark as he tried in vain to move onto the next phrase.)

Yet, they kept going. Even when there was no sun left, the two still kept reading. By the time they both went to bed, they were nowhere near fluent, but even the few hours spent reading and gesturing was enough for Clark to think things would only get better from here on out.

Chapter End Notes

me dumping a shit ton of mer lore into one chapter This will make for interesting reading, right?

... Right?

Anyway, I don't know about you lot reading it, but I had fun writing this XD I have a thing for making lore heavy fics, what can I say? It was also fun to expand on some of the stuff I've hinted at in previous chapters, and that will only grow from here on out so fingers crossed you liked it :D

As always, let me know your thoughts! Your comments mean the world to me, and I love hearing all of your theories ;D

Till next time! x

Chapter 28

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

September 10th 2016

Sign language, as it turned out, was a God send.

After the first day with the book, Clark took the next few to read through it multiple times and practice the motions within. During the evening, he'd meet Blue by his pool and let him do the same. He'd poke his upper body out from the water and lean over the edge, using the tip of his finger to flip from page to page, attempting to minimise the amount of water that could potentially warp the papers as he'd read.

Which was of course too little too late. Already, in the brief time they had the book, the pages were wrinkled. Clark only hoped the librarian would accept whatever excuse he came up with as to why that was the case should he be grilled for details, though he doubted very much that the man he met would even care.

Clark couldn't exactly bring himself to care, either. The most important thing in his mind, was that one of the largest issues plaguing himself and Blue, was now theoretically solved, so what if a book got a little damaged in the process?

He knew it would take time to get to the point where they were completely fluent, but the main thing was that they were getting there, *finally*.

For one thing, he was able to ask Blue why his semen apparently stained like a mother fucker and refused to come off his sheets, even with bleach.

He hadn't noticed the state of them until he had been changing bed. He saw the black stain that had been on it before it had gone through a washer, unmoved and not even a little faded.

So he asked Blue why that was the case. Though truthfully, asked was too grandiose of a term. Instead he simply said ‘the *fuck* Blue?’ as he brought the ruined sheet to the mer, to which he only replied with. ‘W E I R D S E M E N.’

Which *technically* was an answer to his question, it was just not one that helped him even remotely figure out *how* to actually get the stain off. Soap, bleach, even scrubbing it with a brush for an hour did nothing to alleviate the black mark, so Clark simply conceded to having to deal with the stain until he eventually brought new sheets, which, knowing himself, might take a while.

It was also with the help of ASL, that Clark learnt something that realistically, he had known for a while, but was simply waiting for the right time to ask.

“Your name,” he had said one evening as he’d sat along the edge of Blue’s pool. The mer himself was staring down at the book before him, and only looked up upon hearing Clark speak. “What is it?”

Blue brought his hands up, and one by one he spelt out a word.

‘B R U C E.’

Clark nodded. “It suits you.” He said softly.

Blue’s lip quirked up at that, and after a moment his hands began to move again. ‘I L I K E B L U E.’

Clark raised a brow at that. “You do?” He asked, and at the mer’s shy smile, he butted his calf against him. “How come?”

For a moment Blue was quiet, and only after a time did his hands move once more. ‘O N L Y Y O U C A L L M E B L U E.’

Clark nodded at that, but slowly, as the words and their implication hit him, his expression shifted. “Wait. Do you have people who call you Bruce? Other mers?”

A single nod. ‘Y E S.’

“Who?” Clark asked, his curiosity burning.

‘F A M I L Y.’

Clark’s eyebrows shot up. “You have a family? A *pod*?”

At the question, Blue’s expression darkened and if that alone didn’t tell Clark the answer to his question before Blue’s hands could. ‘D I D.’

“You…” Clark winced. “You did?”

A single nod.

Clark couldn’t help it, when he saw that word, he found his mouth moving before his brain had any say in the matter. “What happened to them?”

At the question, Blue frowned. Clark almost voiced an apology, one that would be swiftly followed with a change in subject that hopefully didn’t involve absent family members, but then Blue began to move. He was slow, as though each gesture was being pulled from him, but eventually he set his hands down with a grim sense of finality and Clark was left to stare at the space those limbs had occupied. ‘T H E Y A R E A L L D E A D.’

Clark opened his mouth to ask another question, but one look at Blue told him to drop it. Maybe another day he could ask more about Blue’s pod. About why he was so sure they were all dead, and how it happened. But right now, he could see that would only lead to needless misery, so instead, Clark slipped into the water and came up behind Blue, running his arms around his midsection and hugging him. He tucked his face in beside Blue’s gills and kissed them till they fluttered. No words of condolences were said, simply the quiet implication of them.

He didn’t ask about Blue’s pod again, and by the next day, they had moved onto different topics. And that was how it went. Clark would ask a question, Blue would answer it.

It was after roughly a week with the book, and with himself and Blue feeling confident enough to talk without having to constantly refer to it, that Clark figured he'd return it before it had a chance to get even more water logged and warped. There were a few other things he had to take care of at Cottonwood, so it seemed like a good idea to get them all out the way given his penchant for putting things off indefinitely.

He got dressed, taking care to be extra gentle as he pulled up his pants and then made his way to the pool. "Blue, I'm heading out now. You need anything?" Clark asked as he stood at the edge of the water. Upon hearing his voice, Blue stirred and poked his head out.

He pointed his finger at Clark before, pointing it away. 'W H E R E A R E Y O U G O I N G?'

"Cottonwood." Clark said. "Gotta return the book, and grab some things. I won't be long. Now, did you want anything?"

Blue nodded, and after that only signed one word. 'M E A T.'

"Yeah, yeah…" Clark muttered, approaching the edge of the pool. He crouched down and upon doing so, Blue pushed himself up onto the edge to meet Clarks mouth. "If they have any, I'll get you some." He said as he kissed Blue on the lips.

Blue made a face, and began to move his hands once more. After a few more signs, Clark found his cheek burning. 'N O T T H A T K I N D O F M E A T.'

Clark looked away, and after clearing his throat levelled his stare at Blue. "Tomorrow, alright?"

Blue frowned. 'B U T I ' M H O R N Y N O W.'

Clark could practically feel the blood in his body rush southward, despite how much pain his crotch was currently in. He took a deep breath. "Look, I get that you wanna do it, but I'm still a little tender from the past few days, okay? Tomorrow."

Blue raised a brow and in the same movement, laid down on his side, his tail swishing from left to right so that the muscles of his stomach flexed. ‘N O W ?’ He signed.

As his eyes trailed down the mer's body, he closed them and steeled himself. “ *Tomorrow* .” Clark repeated. When he cracked open his eyes, he saw Blue’s own on him, his lip wedged between his teeth as he sent him a playful smile. “I…” Clark began; the rest of the sentence temporarily caught in his throat. “I’m going to town now, alright? So just be patient. I won’t be long.”

Clark could practically feel Blue’s annoyance as his fingers twitched, as though debating whether or not to keep pushing the matter. In the end, he didn't, so with a single huff, Blue rolled back into the water, bubbles of his displeasure rising as he went to his corner. Clark sighed as he stood up, debating whether he should say anything else, but one look at Blue’s sullen expression told him the answer to that.

Clark made his way to his boat, then hopped onboard and began his journey to Cottonwood. Whilst he intended to return the book today, the real reason he was choosing to do it today rather than say, tomorrow, had everything to do with the gremlin he had left back at the island.

He had no idea why, but these past few days Blue had been insatiable. If there was a flat surface on the island, he and Blue had fucked on it. Morning or night, rain or shine, they were worse than cats in heat and that had been fine at first; with day one being great, day two being good, and day three being... something.

And there in lay the crux of the issue; today would be the forth day in a row, and given the trajectory of his own pleasure over the past three, he doubted day four would suddenly change course and rocket back upwards. For one, Clark could *feel* his body start to betray him, specifically, one particular *part* of his body. So despite what his mind was telling him, he knew he had to tap out.

As he reached the dock, Clark stepped off the boat, readjusting his pants with a wince. His mind went to the pharmacy, and he began to make his way towards it, hoping they’d have something to help soothe him.

They did. And after picking up a tube of cream that Clark couldn’t pronounce, he continued on his way up the street.

The next stop was Lucy's and as he pushed open the door, he was confronted with two things.

One, that the person at the counter was not Lucy.

And two, that the back of the boy's head in front of her looked vaguely familiar.

"Uh." Clark let out as he stood there, holding the door open.

Barbara's stare flew to him, her mouth already open with words likely already waiting to be spoken.

As her mouth bobbed, the boy in front of her turned to face him.

His face.

His face was not what Clark was expecting.

His eyes blew wide. "Holy shit." He muttered.

"Are you Clark?" The teen asked, a playful smile on his lips. "Babs told me about you."

"You--" Clark let out, his eyes still darting around the boy's features. "You--"

"Oh, right, sorry." He said as he stepped away from the counter towards him. "My name is Dick. But you already probably knew that, right?"

Despite knowing Clark was being spoken to, he found no words. He was still dumbfounded. As he stared at the teen in front of him, Marcos' words came to him.

“They’re twins, apparently. Non identical obviously. I mean, they look nothing alike.”

That was putting it mildly. The boy before him looked nothing like Jason, and whilst Clark could go on about the multitude of differences between the two, the most striking were those eyes.

Clark had never seen a person with eyes like Dick’s.

He had seen them on a mer, though.

~~*You are honestly not thinking what I think you are, right? It’s a coincidence, pure and simple.*~~

Eventually Clark knew he had to speak. For one, the pair of teens were looking at him much like someone might look at a home intruder, all fear and grave apprehension. So with great difficulty, Clark opened his mouth and found words despite how few he had. “You’re… Selina’s son, right?”

Dick smiled at that, and God, that smile, Clark's eyes blew wide again, and he actually found himself stepping back. *This is uncanny, he looks just like--*

~~*Coincidence.*~~

“Yeah, I'm her son. You met my brother, Jason, right?” He looked away for a moment, another smile making his way onto his face. “I heard he was kinda a douche to you, and well, I just wanted to say sorry for him. He’s sort of, well, a douche.”

“Uh huh.” Clark let out automatically.

At the minimal response, Dick’s brows furrowed, and he turned towards Barbara. Barbara though wasn’t looking back at him, her eyes still glued to Clark with unrelenting intensity. “Look, I'm gonna head out." Dick eventually said. "It was nice to meet you, Clark.”

“Right.” Came Clarks equally monotone response.

Dick’s mouth opened once more, but this time, he didn’t say anything. He bobbed his head towards Clark, and with one final look towards Barbara, left the store and made his way up the high street. Clark was still frozen in place, and after a minute of silence, Barbara burst from behind the counter towards him. “Clark, *please* don’t tell my aunt!”

His eyes blew wide at the sudden appearance of the small redhead before him, and as such he stepped back once more. But Barbara wasn’t having it, she came close, her hands reaching for his shirt as though to keep him from moving any further away. “I don’t know what she said to you, but I know she said something, so please, you can’t say you saw Dick here. She’ll go *ballistic* if you do.”

Even without the pleading eyes of Barbara staring up at him, he knew he had to say something, so with more effort than was truly required, he spoke. “I won’t say anything.”

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

With that, Barbara let go of him, and she released a sigh so deep it was as though all the air in her lungs went with it. She made her way behind the counter again, though she didn’t remain seated upright, opting instead to fall against the wood with a thud. “Everything's fucked.” She muttered.

Clark pursed his lips, and despite being able to count the amount of teenage girls he had comforted in his life on one hand, he still approached the counter. “Come on now, things ain’t that bad...”

“Oh, they aren't?” Barbara said, whipping her head up so fast her hair brushed against Clark’s face. “Silly me, I must have been over thinking the whole ‘could get kicked out if aunt Lucy saw me talking to Dick ever again’ thing.”

“I just…” Clark began, making a face. “I just don’t get it, Dick seems--” Clark faltered as the image of his face entered his mind once more. ~~*Coincidence.*~~ “Nice.”

“He *is* nice!” Barbara blurted. “He’s more than nice, he’s sweet, thoughtful, *and* funny. But fuck all of that apparently, as the minute aunt Lucy saw him she stiffened up like he was a eighty year old pensioner who reeked of piss.” After the outburst, Barbara sat back in her seat and crossed her arms. “She was like that with his whole family. God, you should have *seen* how she looked at Selina. Bare in mind, Selina hadn’t even said a *word* to her, and she looked at her like this--” What followed was the most severe stink eye Clark had ever bore witness to, so much so, he found himself frowning in sympathy from it.

“Maybe she knows something you don't.” Clark offered. “Come on now, Barb. I know your aunt, why would she not want you seeing someone unless she had a good reason for it?”

“That's the problem!” Barbara hissed. “Every time I mention it she just says ‘I can't tell you, but I have my reasons, Barbara,’ and it's like, okay? Well, I want to know what they are? If you’re saying I can’t be with Dick, then tell me *why* , like, what could be so bad that she doesn't want me seeing him?”

Clark frowned, casting his eyes downward. “I really wish I could answer that for you.”

“I wish you could, too.” Barbara muttered.

Clark waited for a moment to see if any more words would follow, and when they didn’t, he gingerly picked up a basket and went about gathering a few essentials-- as well as the single loan steak in the chiller. When he set them on the counter, without saying a word Barbara began ringing him up, and only once she passed the bag over did her eyes meet his. “Sorry I sort of dumped all that on you.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it.” Clark said, with a wave of the hand. “And if it wasn’t obvious, I won’t tell Luce about any of it.”

“Thanks.” Barbara said, trying for a smile, though it barely registered as one. “I really wish I knew what her deal was, but…”

“What about Selina? She ever mention why Luce might not like her?”

“Honestly? She laughed when I asked.”

Clark frowned. “That’s odd.”

“That’s Selina.” Barbara shrugged.

With that, Clark said his goodbyes and made his way out onto the high-street. He made a quick detour to the library and after handing the book back to the librarian, who thankfully was as disinterested in the book's less than pristine appearance as he had been when Clark had first signed it out, he made his way to the very top of the street.

As he looked at the property, he saw there was an ornate wall now surrounding it in place of construction tape, and whilst there was a gap where Clark presumed a gate would be going, at the moment, there was only two temporary fence panels acting as one. He didn't enter at first, opting to look at the building from where he stood. He was greeted with something that definitely looked like it could be a home. The ground was now paved, with lush turf in certain areas, and the walls were up and painted, too. It was a bit modern for Clark’s tastes, but he couldn't deny it looked nice.

He wasn’t however given long to take it all in before he heard a voice from beside him.

“You're trespassing.”

Clark didn’t even need to turn his head to know who was speaking.

“I'm not even *on* the property.” Clark quipped as he finally turned to look at Jason who must have been walking along the exterior wall when he’d seen him.

“Well, you were gonna be.” Jason muttered as he glared at Clark. “Don't lie.”

“I was just going to ask your mother something. Is she here?”

“She doesn't want to fuck you.”

Clark frowned. “I don't want to have sex with your mother.”

Jason however only scowled. “Don’t lie.”

“I really am not .” Clark said and without any other words stepped from the pavement past the wall. Jason rocketed after him, though his speed was limited by his limp.

“The fuck you don’t. I told you, you are not welcome here, so how about you fuck off, you--”

“Jason!”

The effect that one word had on the boy was immediate. His shoulders lowered and his face grew meek. He turned slowly and eyed the woman standing in the doorway. “Oh, hey mom.”

Selina rolled her eyes and set her hands on her hips. “What are you doing to Mr. Kent? Is that how you’ve been greeting visitors? By threatening them?”

“Naw, I only threatened him, mom.” Jason said, and Clark was actually someone surprised by the honestly.

She shook her head with a tutt and came towards them both. “Why don’t you go find Dick, I think he’s out on the beach.”

“Right. Just--” he looked between her and Clark and Clark got the distinct impression that they were talking to one another with nothing more than looks; as Jason's eyes narrowed and Selina's hand darted out and rested on his shoulder in comfort.

Eventually Jason left and Clark was left with the painfully seductive smile Selina was sending his way. He cleared his throat as her eyes trailed up and down across his body, and his body all but seized when her hand slinked out and rested across his peck. “Now then, to what do I owe this pleasure--Clark, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, it's, uh--” he looked down at her hand and noticed how sharp the nails on her hands were. “It’s Clark.”

“Well, Clark...” She purred. “Why don't you tell me why you're visiting little ole me? ”

“Uh.” Clark let out, and as though a string that was holding him upright was cut, he stumbled back, sputtering. “I was just wondering if Walter was here.”

“Walter?” Selina asked, her eyebrow arching up. “Why would you want to know that?”

“I was interested in some building work getting done, and figured he knew who to call or might even be willing to do it himself.” He brought his hand up and smoothed the front of his shirt. “He is here, right?”

Selina's face blew through a few emotions, but the most obvious to Clark were disappointment and confusion. They were however quickly gone, replaced with an easy smile that Clark was beginning to expect was her neutral expression. “Oh yes, Walter’s just overseeing construction of the spa. I'll take you to him.”

“Thanks.” He said, and quickly fell in step with Selina as he walked inside the house.

Despite the outside looking largely finished, the inside was a whole other story. Wiring hung from the ceiling, and if it wasn’t for the few odd pieces of furniture dotted around the place, Clark wouldn’t have known anyone was actually living here yet.

That thought was further compounded when Clark walked through the kitchen and saw the countertops had yet to be assembled and after a quick scan of the cupboards, found only cups of ramen.

“Have you guys already moved in?” Clark found himself asking as he continued to follow Selina through the labyrinth of corridors and rooms.

“Sort of. When we visit we do it for a few days at a time. Walter doesn't mind, and it also means I can see how things are coming along.”

“You’ve got a lot going on in here.” Clark said as they passed a room that looked like a small cinema. The workman inside was currently attaching the projector to the ceiling.

Selina looked over her shoulder at him. “When it comes to where I live, I want everything I could possibly need all in one place.”

“I see." Clark said more to himself as they kept walking. Eventually it looked as though they'd reached their destination and Selina pulled open a heavy looking door and stepped through it.

“Just in here.” She said and as Clark followed her through, his eyes blew wide at the sight before him.

“Jesus Christ.” He muttered.

This was no spa. It looked like an indoor beach, replete with a artificial shore line that tapered off into what looked like a massive tank-like pool. The floor was covered in sand colour tiling and it was only along one side of the room that furnishings that could be considered to be part of a spa resided; namely a sauna, a steam room and showers. The ceiling had fairy lights embedded into it, mimicking the look of a night sky, and the windows were high and by the looks of it, tinted. Clark was so entranced by it all that he didn't even realise Selina was no longer by his side until she was returning with Walter in tow.

“Clark!” Walter said brightly as he held his hand out to him. “Good to see you. Taking a look around at everything?”

“Uh huh.” Clark uttered, though still overwhelmed with what he was seeing, he managed to bring his hand out to Walter and give a meek handshake.

“Well, just so you know, the other property is still up for grabs and whilst it’s not going to have everything this one has, it will be pretty dang close, so if--”

“Actually Walter, I was hoping to talk to you about that.”

“Oh?” Walter let out, his excitement palpable. He turned to Selina, and bowed his head. “Forgive me Ms. Kyle, I'm just going to talk to Clark real quick and then I'll get right back to overseeing the pools construction.”

“Go for it.” Selina said with a languid wave of the hand. “I'm just going to have a look around.”

Once she was gone, Walter ushered him to the corner of the room, by the showers. There were a few chairs and tables with water bottles and cereal bars here, a makeshift break area by the looks of it. As Walter sat down, Clark joined him. He reached for a bottle of water and quickly unscrewed it. After he gulped down half of the contents, he set it back down and sighed. “So, about the property.”

“Right.” Clark said, as he reached for a bottle of his own and took a sip from it. “The thing is, I don't want to buy the property.”

Despite how hard Walter must have been trying to keep his expression neutral, he failed miserably and Clark didn't miss how dejected the words left him. “Okay.” Walter said, his voice rising at the end of the word in silent question.

“I was actually wondering, how much would it be for you to build me a house. On my own island.”

Walter looked surprised by the question, and yet provided an answer relatively quickly all things considered. “It depends.”

“On?”

Walter held up his hand and began bending down his fingers. “On what you’re looking for, size, where you're located, infrastructure, existing structures, permits.” He brought his hand down. “The list goes on, the point is, it would be expensive. *Very* expensive.”

Clark kept his stare resolute. “I can afford it.”

Walter sat back in his chair, and after sizing Clark up for a moment, he shrugged. “Usually, I would attempt to dispute that, but over the years I have learnt that most people who dress fancy are actually broke, and most people who look like tramps are actually rich.”

“So does that mean you'll do it?”

Walter looked down at his clipboard and flicked through the paper there. “I mean, not anytime soon. My workmen are tied up here, but theoretically, once we’re done here, I can see about working on your project.” He reached for the phone in his pocket, and raised a brow to Clark in question. “Where abouts are you located?”

“I’m nearby. Longitude 40.177599, latitude -121.785123.”

“Whoa, say that again.” Walter said, his finger tapping on the screen. “Slowly, this time.”

Clark did just that and after repeating himself, Walter finished typing and looked down at his screen. His brows furrowed together not even a moment later, and he looked up at Clark with a raised brow. “I’m not seeing any island registered with those coordinates.”

“Yeah, uh, it’s a long story. I didn’t buy it or anything, just sort of moved there a while back and no one has ever kicked me off.”

Walter raised a brow. “So you don’t own it?”

“Nope.”

Walter closed his eyes and heaved a sigh. “Okay, well that's something I better get working on ASAP as I'm going to need deeds to get the right permits and building permission.” He reached for his clipboard and brought his pen to it. “What did you name it? I’ll need to know when I register it.”

“It’s called--” Clark began, and only then realised in all the years he’d lived there, he had never once thought to name it. Diana had often referred to it as a prison on her visits, but to Clark it wasn’t a place he felt trapped. It was a place where he could be alone, separated from the rest of the world whist he healed. That was the thought that was in his mind as the next word left his lips. “Solitude.”

“Solitude.” Walter repeated as he wrote it down. “Alright then. Now I'm going to need an advance payment to cover the fees.”

“Right.” Clark said, already reaching for his cheque book. “You think two hundred thousand is enough?”

“Two hun--” but Walter didn’t even finish the word, stuttering to a stop. He looked at Clark’s earnest expression and then only nodded. “Yes, that will be enough." He stared at Clark's hands as he wrote. "You, uh... You really weren’t kidding when you said you had money, huh?”

“No, I was not.” Clark said as he finished writing the cheque. He handed it to Walter who deftly slid it into his clipboard. “Just let me know when you can get to work, and I'll get you the rest of the money.”

“Of course.” Walter wrote a few things down, then handed the clipboard over to Clark. “Write down your number here, and I’ll call when me and my partner are ready to come do a survey. We’ll look at what you’ve got already, what you’re looking for in your property and once we’ve done that we can give you a solid quote and get started. Until then, you have my number if you have any questions and now I have yours.” Walter nodded when Clark handed back the clipboard. “Perfect. Well, it was good seeing you, Clark. Now if you'll excuse me.”

He got up and walked back towards the giant pool structure and as he did Selina slinked towards him, her smile brighter than ever as she stopped in front of Clark. “Good talk?”

“Yeah, uh, thank you for bringing me to talk to him, Selina.”

“Oh, no problem.” She said with a wave of the hand. “Though I will say I'm a little disappointed to hear you’re not going to be moving in next door. You as a neighbour would have been just--” she bit her lip as her eyes trailed down his body.

Clark tried to say something, but it was as though the muscles of his mouth refused to work, freezing his face in place instead.

Despite the near blank expression he wore, Selina only laughed, crossing her arms together in such a way that her breasts were suddenly in full focus. “God, you are precious aren't you? A woman flirts with you and you act more shy than a nun at an orgy.”

“...You’re flirting with me?” Clark found himself asking.

“Guilty as charged.” Selina said, holding up her hand as though swearing on a bible. “Honestly, with those eyes, that beard, that *body* , it's a wonder you’re single.”

“Oh, I'm not…” But he didn't finish, his lips snapping shut.

Selina’s brow arched up and for a moment, her eyes became oddly analytical, as though every spec of Clark’s very being was being picked apart under a microscope. It unnerved him, and he couldn't help the small shiver that ran through his body as a result. “You’re not single?” Selina asked, that playful veneer chipped slightly.

“No, I'm not.” He said slowly. When Selina's eyes remained fixed on him, he continued, “sorry for not saying something sooner.”

It was remarkable to watch her face morph once more. Her smile slid back into place and Clark could feel no breath of cold coming from it. “Oh, what are you saying?” She said, batting her hand out. “I should be the one apologizing. Flirting with a taken man. What’s the lucky person’s name, anyway?”

Clark made a face, and that same flicker in Selina's eyes returned. He had told himself he would keep talk of Blue to a minimum, but in that moment, with those sharp eyes on him, he supposed simply sharing a name wasn’t a problem, after all, it was just a name, it wasn’t like he was going out and broadcasting that he was fucking a mer.

“Blue,” he ended up saying.

“ *Blue?* ” She repeated as though for clarity.

“Yeah. Blue.”

For some reason, Clark got the feeling that wasn’t the name Selina was wanting to hear, and why that would be the case, he didn’t know. Nevertheless, her expression softened upon hearing the name and she looked away. “That's a cute name.”

“I’ll tell them you said that.”

Selina smiled at that. “Please do.” She looked around the place then, before returning her gaze towards Clark. “Now come on, I'll show you out.”

Clark followed Selina back out of the room, through the many corridors, until finally, they were back outside. Once there, she turned to him, her head held high. “When the place is finished, you should come by.”

Clark shoved his hands into his pockets, rocking back onto his heels. “That's nice of you to offer Selina, but I get the feeling your son wouldn’t like that very much.”

Selina blew a raspberry. “Don’t worry about him. Jason’s just a little... Standoffish. He gets it from his father.”

Clark stilled at the words. After all, it was the sort of statement that invited enquiry. Whilst he could see parts of Selina shining though on Jason; whether it was the warm skin, or green eyes, Dick looked nothing like either of them, his skin fairer, his eyes like snow in the early morning-- tinged with the faintest hint of blue.

It was wholly those eyes that caused that single word to repeat in his mind. *Father*. ~~*It’s a coincidence.*~~

“Right.” Clark said slowly. “Speaking of his father, is he…?”

“What? Here?” Selina asked, and when she did, she let out a single sharp laugh. “Oh no. He’s dead.”

“Oh.” Clark said, pursing his lips. ~~*See?*~~ “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Selina for the most part only looked disinterested as she folded her arms and looked out across her home. “It is what it is. Lot of people lost loved ones during the Metropolis quake. I'm no different.

“You--” Clark faltered, his palms suddenly clammy. “You used to live in Metropolis?”

“That I did.” Selina said, and her eyes flicked to Clark once more. “We were there the day the wave hit. Me and my boys were lucky. My partner however, not so much. We never actually found his body, but… I think four years of radio silence answers that unknown for me.”

“God.” Clark said, his voice hoarse. “I’m so sorry to hear that.”

Selina only shrugged her shoulders. “It is what it is. All I care about is taking care of my family, with or without their dad.”

“I mean, you’ve done a great job.” Clark said, chancing a smile. “Seriously. I can’t imagine it's been easy.”

For a moment, Selina looked oddly at ease, not poised in a way that hinted at an ulterior motive. She smiled, but this one was gentle, absent minded, as though it was fuelled only by the thoughts in her head, and not by those who stood before her. “God, you have no idea what it's like,” she said fondly, “taking care of three--” but she stopped, her mouth snapping closed, her smile suddenly gone.

“Three?” Clark prompted, and when he did Selina’s eyes blew wide.

“The three of us.” Selina said quickly. “Taking care of the three of us. It's been hard.”

“Right.” Clark said, suddenly unsure of what else to say.

At that, Selina turned away from him, looking over her shoulder towards the beach. “Well, it's been nice talking, Clark, but I better go see what my boys are up to. Take care.” She rushed off then, not even waiting for Clark to respond.

He watched her walk away until she was completely out of view. As he did, he paused and stared at the spot she had been occupying only moments ago. There was a lot to unpack, but in that present moment, the only thing consuming his mind was one word, that single word that would often overwhelm his mind should he let it.

Metropolis.

Maybe that's why he had recognized her. Could they have met once before all those years ago? What if she worked nearby, maybe he had passed her on the streets on his way to work, maybe they had even shared words whilst waiting in line for coffee. He didn't know, and yet, he knew he had met her there. Knew it in the way her eyes haunted him, taunting him with the half memory they concealed.

He made his way back towards the dock, debating whether or not to say hello to Marcos whilst he was here, but in the end didn’t. He had already stayed here longer than he had intended to and his words to Blue about not being out for long were already enough of a lie without him making them worse by staying here any longer.

The journey back was uneventful, and when he returned, he quickly stored his groceries away and once that was done, reached into the paper bag for his cream.

He looked over the packaging once more, and then opened one end and tipped the tube out. He then cast a quick look towards Blue’s pool, and found him asleep within it.

Good. Clark thought, the last thing he needed was to be walked in on.

He eased down his pants and sat on the edge of the bed. Even looking at his dick caused him to wince. It wasn’t bleeding or anything, but the skin of it was red and tender. Clark only hoped the cream would do something to help with that. He had thought it was an unusual thing to happen, but from the

pharmacist's calm responses, friction burns on the penis were common in those who masturbated or had sex too much.

Yet, in all of Clark's years, including when he was a *very* horny teenager, he had never experienced this. Then again, with Blue, he honestly wasn't that surprised when his dick had started to hurt during sex. Between the weird semen and the glowing skin, he was only waiting for when the next instance of biological fuckery would rear its head.

Now though, he just had to take it easy, and hope that the cream would work its magic. He uncapped it, pierced the foil and then unloaded a large dollop onto his palm. He moved it around the skin of hand, and when it was suitably spread, he brought it to the hot skin of his cock.

The sound he made upon contact was not unlike when he slid into Blue, but really, he just couldn't help himself. The cool cream was indeed helping and he found the noises increasing the more cream he rubbed onto the hot skin.

And with those sounds spilling from his lips, Clark really should have expected what happened next.

He heard creaking wood, and at the sound, his head to flick to the doorway.

Sure enough, there was Blue, staring back at him. 'W I T H O U T M E ?' He signed with narrowed eyes.

Clark looked down at himself, and immediately realised how this looked. "Ah ah ah, no!" Clark said, bringing the blanket to cover his lap. "I wasn't doing, *you know* ." At Blue's less than impressed expression, he continued. "My dick hurts, okay? I was putting cream on it."

Blue shimmied his way over to him, and then sat back on his rear. 'H U R T S ?'

"Yeah, I think it's friction burns." Clark pulled the blanket back, and despite the white cream covering most of his dick, the redness beneath still came through. "I mean, we have done it…" Clark tried to think of the number, but he had stopped counting after twenty. "A lot," he continued. "And well, I just need a little break. I know I said we'd fuck tomorrow, but my dick is currently out of action, so it ain't gonna happen for at least a couple days, at least."

‘L I T T L E B I T ?’ Blue asked, hopefully.

“No.” Clark dead panned. “Are you not seeing my dick right now? It’s red *raw* . In all my years on Earth, I have *never* had this.”

Blue pursed his lips together. ‘T H A T I S B E C A U S E I T I S N O T F R I C T I O N.'

Biological fuckery. "Oh?" Clark uttered, his eyebrows raised in mock surprise.

'M Y G E N I T A L S A R E A C I D I C.’

Clark really thought he was ready for whatever Blue would say, and yet, those words caused him such unbridled pain that he brought his hands to his temples, rubbing them to try and alleviate the sudden headache there. “God fucking damn it, Blue...” He muttered before jerking his head up to the mer, glaring. “What other weird shit are you hiding from me, huh?”

Blue shrugged, and if that didn’t just make Clark roll his eyes even harder.

“God, I know *I'm* weird, but acidic genitals and weird cum, and the glowing thing, *by the way* , you hid that from me, too.” Clark crossed his arms. “I didn't even know mers could glow...”

Blue was quiet at that, and he didn’t offer to break the silence either. Despite the awkwardness Clark should probably feel about his dick being out and covered in topical cream, the moment felt surprisingly normal, even as Blue moved from his spot on the floor and climbed onto the bed beside him. He didn’t try to reach for his dick like Clark was half expecting him to and instead laid down along the mattress.

After pulling his underwear back up, Clark fell back against it to join him. “How was your day by the way? You get up too much here?”

‘M A S T U R B A T E D.’

Clark huffed a laugh. “Jesus. You really are insatiable.”

‘H O R N Y.’

“Yeah, I gathered.”

‘P L E A S E T O U C H M E.’

Clark opened his mouth to object, but one look at Blue’s puppy eyes had him sighing. “Alright, but just because you look so pathetic.” Clark reached for the slit on Blue’s front and found his cock already poking out, the pink of it right there on show. “Are all mer’s this horny, or just you?”

Blue tried to sign, but as Clark's fingers were now working their way into his slit, he abandoned that idea and simply began to screech. Clark smiled at the sound, his fingers spreading Blue open until his cock slid out completely, wrapping around his hand in the same motion. He gripped it tightly. “How do you want it, B?”

Blue screeched and Clark raised a brow. “Nice and slow?” Blue shook his head. “Slow. Got it.”

That joke however didn’t last long as Blue’s hand came out and swatted Clark clean across the skull. It didn’t hurt much, but it still caused him to gasp. Out of spite, Clark lessened his grip considerably, until his hand was barely touching the writhing appendage.

Another hit to the head soon came, and this was accompanied by several hisses. Clark rolled his eyes, and tightened his grip, tugging Blue’s cock in sharp jagged motions. “You really are a gremlin. A stupid, sexy, piece of shit, gremlin.”

Even though Clark was insulting him, Blue's expression and the sounds showed he did not care one bit. Clark doubted he cared about much of anything right now. Clark leant in close to his ear. “If I could, I would fuck you so hard. I’d fuck you until the bed collapsed, until you were fucking *raw* .”

Blue’s arms circled around his neck, and despite how raw his own cock was, it was getting somewhat excited by the sounds and sights on display. Clark ignored it though, as he was sure that even the

gentlest amount of friction on it right now was a *very* bad idea.

So he focused on Blue, on those sounds as well as the way his body writhed. There was no restraint to speak of, he was unleashed, throwing himself to and fro with each press of Clark's hand, moving hard enough that Clark worried his bed would actually break.

And then, there was only a single scream accompanied by his body falling completely limp.

As he all but melted into the bed, Clark smiled down at his sweaty face. “Are you feeling better now?”

Blue just about managed a nod.

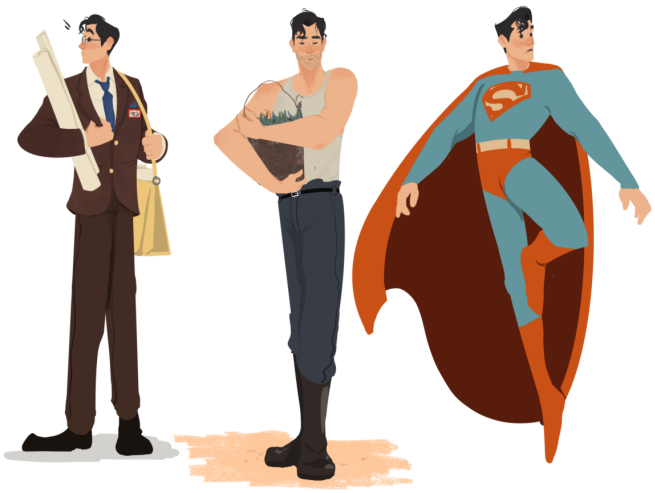
“Good, now I'm going to--” but as Clark went to get up he looked down at himself and saw an inky black fluid currently soaking into his cargo shorts. “God damn it...” He muttered as he looked down at the stain. He had no one else to blame. It wasn’t as if Blue was intentionally trying to ruin his clothes by smearing his weird cum all over them. And yet, he couldn’t help but be a little mad at the mer. “No more fucking on linen or if I have clothes on. I can't have everything be stained by your weird cum, B.”

Despite how jelly-like his movements were, Blue still managed a meagre ‘S O R R Y’ before letting his hands full back to his sides with a thump.

“Yeah, yeah…” Clark said with a wave of the hand. “Just rest here for a little while, I’m gonna go take care of some things around the island and then I'll be back.”

And that was what he did as Blue rested, Clark worked around the island until evening, and rather than try to carry Blue back to his pool, he slept beside him, holding the mer close.

Yes he had to swat at him every time he tried to wiggle those damn hips of his, but that's neither here nor there.



Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the length between updates, gang. I sort of had a little break down at the beginning of August and am only now getting back into the swing of things. I know I say this every time, but it really is your kind words that keep me going so thanks again for all your support <3

I also want to say a big thank you to Jasmine Dragon Art for her lovely art of the boys! Seriously, I love it so much!! :D

But yes, back to the chapter. Intrigue is abound, questions have been raised, when will they be answered? Who knows? (°ʖ°)

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed. Catch you all next time! Take care :)

Chapter 29

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

September 19th 2016

Whatever was possessing Blue's libido wasn't long for this world.

After allowing sufficient time for himself to recover, Clark found Blue lounging in his pool, and upon taking off his shirt and sidling along beside him he was greeted with a tail fin in the face. He would have used his words to clarify the mer's opinion on the matter, but another swat of the tail answered his proposition far better than a sign would have done.

Not that Clark was all too bothered. Blue's libido was much like the tide, and whilst it might be low tide at the moment, Clark knew it was only a matter of time before high tide was back and he was swept off his feet in the crash of water that was horny Blue.

So with his free time now not being spent either fending off or outright evading Blue, today he was sat by the pool, his feet dangling into it as he poured over the pile of paperwork in his hand.

"You know, I don't actually think I'll have enough money for the house." He muttered as he set the paper down and reached for the letter beside him. He looked at it once more, taking in the account balance written near the top. "I mean, I don't know what it will cost yet, but I have made a significant dent in the money you got me."

Blue's forehead was poking out from the water, allowing Clark to view his furrowed eyebrows in all their glory. He brought his hands up just above the surface, and began to move them. 'I D I O T.'

Clark however, just rolled his eyes. "Look, if it comes to it, I'll just have to tell Walter to scale everything down." At Blue's blank expression, he went on. "Like, maybe less bedrooms, or instead of a big pool, you can have a smaller one."

That caused Blue to sit up properly and Clark was greeted with a tight frown. ‘I W A N T N I C E P O O L. N O T C H E A P.’

“Well, Mr. Money bags, you’re gonna need to do another dive then, ‘cause at the moment, you’re getting a paddling pool, not an Olympic one.”

Which is what led to Blue leaving the pool in a huff and all but pushing Clark towards his boat. Clark got the picture relatively quickly, and after quickly throwing on some clothes they jumped on board and sailed towards Blue’s diving spot. Clark parked up and waited for Blue to go down into the water, and waited even longer for him to then come back up.

It wasn’t for naught though, as after a couple of hours Blue was back, holding aloft another awful looking bag. He didn’t lift it up completely out of the water though, and it took Clark a minute to realise why. “Oh.” He said as he crouched down and took the bag from him. “Rib still sore?”

Blue didn’t even dignify that with a sign as he rolled his eyes and hoisted himself up onto the platform. Clark lifted the bag up easily and even without opening it he knew it was fuller than the last one Blue had brought him. He peeled back one of the skin flaps with a grimace and caught sight of the shimmering gold within. “Jesus.” He muttered as he poured over the contents before tipping the bag into the waiting buckets. “I know I said Mr. Money bags, but that really doesn’t cover it. You’re King of the money bags.”

When the bag was empty he turned to Blue, whose smug expression truly could not be overstated. ‘W H E N S H I P S F A L L I N D E E P W A T E R, O N L Y M Y K I N C A N G E T T H E R E.’ He signed.

“Oh?” Clark said, raising his brows with an appreciative nod. “So black fins are the richest mers in the sea, huh? Who would have thought...”

That caused Blue’s expression to change and he opened his mouth, and even twitched his hands as though ready to speak, but in the end choosing not to. Clark watched the display for a moment before turning his attention back to the coins. As he did, he realised that the haul was predominantly gold this time around, with very little of the mottled silver making an appearance.

“I may as well head to Sacramento now." He said as he looked down at the coins. "You gonna be okay to swim back from here?” Clark asked as he turned his head back towards Blue, who still seemed lost in thought. It took Clark approaching him and even crouching down to his level before the mer’s eyes were pulled from the floor towards him. Clark frowned. “You okay?”

Blue nodded, and even chanced a smile. He then lifted his hands. ‘Y E S, C A N S W I M F R O M H E R E.’

Clark’s frown however still remained, and as he opened his mouth to repeat his question, Blue darted forward, placing a chaste kiss on his lips before sliding off the platform into the water. Clark stood up, and turned to his retreating body, his mouth still hanging open with his unspoken question.

Despite sign language helping significantly, there were still times where during conversation Clark would see Blue’s face morph into one of quiet frustration, as if the words he was signing were not the ones in his mind, or perhaps that he didn’t feel as though he *could* voice the ones in his mind. Clark wanted to push him when he got like that, to let him know that he would patiently wait for whatever Blue wanted to tell him, no matter how long it would take to sign every word, but as if sensing that, Blue would always brush off those questioning looks whenever they arose and so, Clark would inevitably drop it.

He’d still think about it though, like the time they ended up speaking about their families. Clark spoke about Lois, briefly, his parents, for slightly longer. He even mentioned Kon and Kara, though he didn’t go into the whole ‘he’s a clone of me and the man who used to try and kill me all the time’ and ‘another castaway of Krypton’ and instead settled on ‘half-brother’ and ‘half-sister’ as those was far easier to explain.

After he’d finished talking and upon some quiet needling on his end, Blue mentioned that he had five children, and that of course caused Clark's eyebrows to raise, and for his mouth to fall open. When Blue had mentioned family, he’d thought of siblings, parents, not children, but before he could enquire further, he was greeted with those same twitching hands and evasive eyes.

Clark watched that expression intently. ~~*He already told you they were all dead. So why are you pressing him?*~~

But… What about?

~~*What about what? Dick? Just because he looks like Blue doesn’t mean he’s his son.*~~

Clark might have asked Blue about it had he not left for the ocean not long after the topic was broached. Clark had meant to raise it again, really, but then he'd think about it further, and a single question would rise above all the rest; what if he was wrong?

So he remained quiet. Even as those thoughts remained.

He couldn't help but think back to that day as he watched Blue disappear completely from view once more, a feeling of deja vu washing over him. Once he was truly alone, he returned to the cockpit and made his way to Sacramento with his haul.

Once there, he carried the buckets through the streets towards where he knew the Darton shop lied.

As he walked up the street, he spotted the store just ahead and noticed someone else walking inside. He followed not too far behind them, and as he stepped through the door he spotting the back of the other person already at the counter, their far fancier bucket on top on it. Jake stood behind the counter, and the smile he wore was warm as he spoke.

"Afternoon, Slade."

"Jake." The man before him said, tapping the side of the bucket so the contents shook. It didn't sound full. "What'll you give me for it?"

"I'll take a look." Jake said as he poured through the metal. Clark watched him as he worked, for lack of anything else to do, and after a few more seconds of silence, Jake chanced a look up at the man before him. "How have things been? Haven't seen you or Selina in a while."

"That's 'cause she moved." The man said bluntly.

"She did?" Jake said, bringing a magnifying glass towards the gold coin in his hand. "Damn, that sucks."

"You're telling me." The man said with a huff. "Now I gotta work even harder to make sure the business doesn't suffer, but you know Selina, she gets a stupid idea in her head and all of a sudden she doesn't care what anyone else's thoughts on the matter are."

"Come on now." Jake said, setting the magnifying glass down. "Can't be that bad."

“Oh yes it can.” Slade said his voice low. “But I won’t bore you with that, especially as you appear to have another customer.”

When the man turned to face him, Clark realised he recognized him. It took him a moment to place him, but after a moment it hit him. He had seen him at the pharmacy. Really, the white hair should have clued him in, but surprisingly it was the face that did it. After all, it wasn’t often you saw people with an eyepatch in today's day and age. Clark only nodded a greeting at the men now staring at him. “Jake,” was all he said.

“Oh, hey there Clark.” Jake said before moving some stuff around on the counter. “Set your stuff down here and I'll take a look at it after I've given Slade’s a once over.”

Clark did just that, and after setting his buckets down the room fell quiet. The only sound was that of clinking of coins as well as Jake’s quiet mutterings as he exclaimed them. After a few more minutes of pouring over them, he looked at Slade. “A hundred thousand,” was all he said.

“Bullshit.” Slade sneered.

“Most of this is low quality.” Jake said easily. “I’m telling you, a hundred is the best you’re gonna get.”

Clark watched the two men before him, with something close to unease blossoming in his stomach. Jake didn’t look weak per say, but the man before him looked like the sort of person even Clark would be reluctant to antagonise. He could feel something brewing in the air, but all at once the tension was displaced as Slade let out a sigh. “Alright, you got me.”

“Good.” Jake said with a smile. He then turned around and grabbed his clip board. “You know the deal, fill this out." After slipping the board in front of Slade he approached Clark and his buckets.

Slade turned to him then and Clark knew he was being sized up. He was somewhat used to it, especially when he worked at the Planet. He was tall, muscular, but always looked easy to take on, due to a combination of bad posture and a bespectacled face. Nowadays, he didn’t have either, but the beard and his general unkempt nature did enough to cause men to give him that same judgmental appraisal.

Usually it did little more than cause a chuckle as Clark thought about the idea that these men believed they had any chance of taking him in a fight, but this time, Clark felt something close to trepidation tickling his spine. There was something in Slade's gaze that told him that he was someone not to be trifled with, and with his fleeting glances to the side, Clark was finally able to take in his face properly. Along with the heavy scarring that was barely covered by the eye patch, there were a few more dotted around his face, including a large one on his lip that trailed right across both of them.

Clark did his best to ignore the staring, and turned his attention back towards Jake who was still looking through the buckets. “How are things, Jake?” He asked to try and quell the silence.

“Oh, they’ve been fine. Same old same old really.” He said, picking out a coin to take a closer look at with a magnifying glass. “I can see you had another good dive.”

“Uh.” Clark swallowed, and despite knowing it was a bad idea, he chanced a look to his side and caught Slade staring right back at him. He didn’t even have the decency to look away when their eyes met once more, and to Clark’s annoyance, he only smiled. Clark turned back to Jake. “Yeah. Yeah I did.”

“Well, that's good to hear.” He said as he turned around and grabbed another clipboard before passing it to Clark. “You know the deal, fill this in and I'll get Sid to give this a better once over.” Without a word, said brother came out from the back room and approached the buckets. He then picked them up and took them to the back room.

“Why didn’t you--” but Clark didn’t continue, still feeling the weight of the man’s stare from beside him.

“What was that?” Jake prompted.

“Uh, it's just.” He cleared his throat, pointing to the lone bucket still in front of them. “You didn’t do that with this guys stuff.”

“Oh.” Jake said, with a wave of the hand. “That’s because Slade’s not a real customer.”

Clark raised a brow. “He’s not?”

Jake laughed at Clark’s earnest expression. “I just mean I've known him a long time, I can be a bit more, say, casual with my quotes for him, and if they end up higher or lower than what I say, he understands.”

“Oh.” Clark said and at that, Jake too retired to the back room, leaving Clark alone with Slade. He could feel he was still being stared at, more so than was really appropriate. That was further compounded when he finally raised the gumption to turn and face the man, only to find his eyes had slid down his body and were now resting at his crotch.

“Can I help you?” He asked bluntly, setting his pen down with a snap.

Slade didn’t respond, his eyes still on his pants, and it took a moment for Clark to realise what he might have been looking at. He turned his attention downward and when he caught sight of the black mark on himself, his eyes blew wide as he felt blood rush to his cheeks. *God damn it, of all the pants I could have worn--*

“That’s an interesting stain.” Slade finally said, and when Clark chanced a look back at the man he saw that single eye boring into him.

“It’s--” Clark's mouth faltered for a second. “Ink.”

“Ink?”

“Yeah, I was writing and my pen leaked onto my pants.”

A single nod was Slade's response. “Right. Ink. Got it.”

And despite being in apparent agreement, something in Slade’s expression caused Clark to falter, his lips curling into a tight frown. “What?”

“Nothing.” Slade said, holding up his hand. “Nothing at all. Was just curious.”

“Well, don't be. I don’t know about you, but my mama taught me it was rude to stare at strangers.”

“Sure it's rude, but we all do it anyway.”

“Then could you at least be more subtle about it.”

“Alright.”

Slade did indeed return to staring, but of course, he was not subtle about it. Clark did his best to ignore it, especially when Jake returned and gave him his quote.

“Jesus.” Clark said more to himself. “Really?”

“Yeah, there were a few rare coins in the mix and I know a guy who will pay whatever I say for them.” Jake crossed his arms and sent Clark a wry grin. “I know I said it last time, but wherever that spot of yours is, keep it *very* hidden, or people like me might come sniffing.” He then went about finishing the paperwork, and once that was done, Clark said his goodbyes and quickly left. He didn't want to hang around, especially with Slade apparently making it his job to catalogue every detail of Clark’s face in his mind.

Of course he should have known that not even five seconds after he left the store, the door jingled once more. He didn’t need to turn to know who was behind him. He would have headed back to the marina then, but with the sound of footsteps following after him wherever he walked, he decided to have some fun with the man who was blatantly following him. He chose to take a more scenic route to the marina and said route was unique to say the least. If it was a rough looking alley or street, Clark walked down it. Clark himself easily brushed past every person who tried to accost him, and despite what he thought might happen, none approached Slade. Hell, none of them even tried to talk to him.

Eventually his patience ran out, and when he hit an alley that was empty, he turned around to face Slade, who didn’t even try to look surprised as Clark came to a stop.

“Okay, the staring was one thing but I didn't realise stalking was one of your hobbies”

Slade rocked back onto his heels, shoving his hands into his pockets. “I was just walking to the marina.” He said easily.

“Right.” Clark said blandly, crossing his arms. “You coulda just walked right down main street and been there in five minutes, but instead you followed me all across town.”

“My sense of direction is not the best.” Slade said with a shrug. “Figured you must be heading to your boat, so I--"

“Bullshit.” Clark ground out, his anger fairing. “Whatever it is you're thinking of doing, I suggest you drop it for your own sake.”

“I’m not thinking of doing anything.” Slade said and despite how hard he must have tried to hide it, Clark saw the barest flicking of a smile on his lips. “Maybe you’re just paranoid.”

Clarks eyes narrowed. “It’s not paranoia if I'm right.”

“But you’re not.” Slade said before letting out a sigh. “Well, you’re not *completely* right.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “I knew it. You are following me.”

“Yeah, because you dropped your wallet.” Slade said as he held aloft the aforementioned item.

Upon seeing it, Clark’s hand immediately flew to his back pocket and he let out a sharp exhale. “How did you--”

“Now I know you weren’t implying I took it.” Slade said with a tut as he approached. “It fell out as you were leaving the store, and I was *trying* to give it to you but you kept walking down all these shady alleys and I figured waving your wallet around was a sure fire way to get mugged, so…” he handed the wallet back to Clark and then stepped back. “You’re welcome, by the way.”

“But--” Clark stared down at the leather surface. It was clearly his wallet, that much was certain, and yet, Clark couldn’t figure out just *how* it could have slipped from his pocket to the floor without him noticing. When he looked at Slade and saw a carefully blank expression there, he schooled his own face to mimic it. “Thank you.” He said.

Slade pulled his hand from his pocket and waved it. “Ah, it was nothing. I would say you could buy me dinner to pay me back, but you really don’t carry much cash in that thing do you?”

“You looked through it?” Clark asked with a frown as he flipped it open and looked through its contents.

“Well, yeah.” Slade said with a raised bow. “Also I know you’re not implying I took anything out of it by looking through it like you are.”

Clark’s eyes only narrowed. He slipped it into his pocket when he conceded nothing had been taken. “You might have done.”

“Right, because if I *had* stolen something, I would have definitely followed you for twenty minutes to give it back.” Slade rolled his eyes. “God, you’re rude.”

“ *I’m* rude?” Clark sputtered. “You stared at me for like ten minutes straight in there!”

“Do you tell everyone with a vision impairment that it's rude to stare?” Slade crossed his arms. “Jesus H Christ. You'd think your 'mama' would have taught you that, at least.”

That caused Clark's mouth to fall. “You-- You didn’t say--”

“I have *one* eye, and the other’s not great, so yeah, I stare. I didn't realise I had to explain my disability to every person I decide to talk to." He set his hands on his hips. "Oh, I know, I'll make a little name badge for myself so this doesn't happen again. It will say 'Slade Wilson ‘legally blind’ please don’t be an ass' on it.”

Clark’s eyes fell to the floor, his face flooding with blood. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t--”

“Yeah, yeah.” Slade battered his hand towards him. “It is what it is, now, can you walk us to the marina, please? I wasn’t lying about the sense of direction thing. Though, it's mainly because of the whole, you know, being blind thing.”

“Right, of course!” Clark said quickly as he held out his hand.

Slade's lips pressed together as he stared at the offered appendage. “Uh, I don't need to hold your hand. Just walk and I'll follow.”

Clark retracted his hand like it had been burnt. “Right. Of course, I'll just--” Clark sputtered as he turned and promptly marched out of the alley.

He walked to the marina and as he did listened for Slade's careful footsteps following after him. The walk was nice, if only for the fact it helped to clear his head. The embarrassment of what had just happened was only now starting to lose the sting, and thankfully it was almost fully gone by the time they reached the marina proper. He walked to his boat before stopping beside it. He then turned back to Slade and regarded the man. “Alright, we’re here.”

“I know.” Slade said, coming to a stop before him. “You know 'legally blind' doesn't mean I can't see anything, right?”

“Right, yeah, I just--” Clark began, only to be stopped by the smile on Slade's face. “What?”

“Nothing, just--" Slade's grin grew then and a light chuckle joined the mix. “You’re just so easy to mess with. You really brought the whole legally blind thing.”

“You’re--” Clark let out, his mouth hanging open.

“Not legally blind? No, no I'm not.” Slade shook his head and wiped his eye. “I mean, sure in this one I am, but this ones still fine. Got great vision in it, actually.”

“Then why did you say you were!” Clark fumed. “What the Hell is wrong with you?”

Slade shrugged his shoulders at that, before shoving his hands back into his pockets. “Nothing, it’s like I said, you’re just so easy to mess with. I couldn't help myself.”

The redness in Clark’s face returned and he took a deep breath to school himself before speaking. “Well then, now that you’ve made me look like an idiot *twice*. I think I'll be off.” At that, Clark hopped onto his boat.

“Wait!”

Despite his better judgement, Clark stopped and turned. “What?”

Slade set his hand on the edge of the boat. “Look I just wanted to say--” He looked around the marina then, his face growing pensive. “Actually, can I come on board to say it?”

“Why?”

“‘Cause there are people around and I don't want them to know what I'm about to tell you.”

Clark examined the man for far longer than necessary. As earlier had already proven, his practically supernatural ability to lie was something that Clark was having trouble with, especially as he didn’t have a single tell than Clark could spot. No fluctuation in heartbeat, no excess of sweating. No matter the words that came from his mouth, to Clark, it sounded like the truth. Perhaps that was why Clark let out a resigned sigh as he turned back around. “Come on board then.” He ended up saying before making his way inside.

He felt the boat rock as Slade jumped on board too, and when he turned, Slade was now in the room, looking around as his hand trailed along the wall and touched a few of the things he had lying around. “Well?”

“Oh, I just wanted to know if you were gay.”

Clark had thought he was prepared himself for whatever was about to come out of Slade's mouth, but apparently he was not as prepared as he thought he was as he sputtered. “ *What?* ”

“I think you’re rather attractive and I wouldn't mind fucking.” Slade raised his eyebrows. “ *That's* what I was getting at.”

Clark’s mouth was still open, and at this point the inside of it was bone dry, he tried to swallow, failed, and promptly choked out a single sentence. “What the Hell?”

Slade approached him then, his hand reaching for his waist. He gripped him with one hand, with the other trailing down his flank. “Are you sure you're not interested?”

Finally, Clark’s brain caught up with the programmed as he pushed Slade away with perhaps a touch more strength than necessary. “The *Hell* is wrong with you?”

Slade stumbled back, his hands returning to his pockets. He pressed his lips together and sighed. “Oh well, guess I struck out. Catch you later, Clark.”

Clark’s disbelief only mounted as he watched Slade leave. The boat rocked once more as he jumped back onto the dock and Clark waited until his footsteps had faded away completely.

Truthfully, Clark didn’t actually know what the Hell had just happened, and any attempt to examine it was met with a big fat claxon going off in his head. *He was just messing with you,* was what he eventually landed on by the time he managed to move and get himself to the cockpit. He started up the boat, and that sentence was all he could think about as he made his way home.

Once there, he found Blue under the jetty for a change and he was up and awake by the time Clark jumped off the boat. “Hey, B.” He said as he approached the shore where the mer was already waiting for him. “You have a good day?”

Blue nodded, and brought his hands up. ‘H O W W A S C I T Y ?’

“Yeah it was okay, just…” Clark said, his lips pressing together. “People are weird.”

Blue seemed to share the sentiments as he nodded once more before making his way inside the cabin. Despite being home, and despite having Blue curled beside him as he read a book before going to sleep, all he could think about was Slade, about what he had said and done, and for whatever reason, he couldn’t shake those thoughts even when sleep eventually took him.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhhhhhhh!

Another chapter done! I sort of churned this one out in a haze because I knew if I didn't get it done today, I would just keep putting it off and that's how my 9 month hiatuses happen.

So I'm back at university now, as the breakdown I had sort of had me questioning what I wanted to do with my life, so, art school is what I decided to do to try and get out of my funk XD I won't lie, it's pretty stressful being back in a school like environment as its been some years since I was last there (I'm old XD) So yeah, if updates get less frequent from now on, at least you guys know why.

But anyway, onto less boring stuff. Slade! He was a lot of fun to write, ngl, but just what he's up to or what he's doing here is still a mystery ;)

As always, let me know your guys thoughts! I love all your lovely comments and they really do keep me going! Take care everyone! And catch you all next time :D x

Chapter 30

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

September 20th 2016

I went to Sacramento yesterday. I met a man there, and honestly, I still don't know what to make of him. I mean, I think he's an asshole for sure, but it's more than that. He gave off such a weird vibe and I don't even want to get into what he did when he came onto my boat.

Part of me wants to tell Blue about it, but considering how he gets when I so much as breathe next to Marcos I don't think telling him I got manhandled by a creep is going to help much.

September 29th 2016

To do list:

~~. Get supplies~~

~~. Check up on Marcos and Porter~~

~~. Buy more of that cream, or for the love of God invent acid proof condoms or Blue will kill you.~~

~~. Refuel engine~~

October 4th 2016

Went to Cottonwood again today. I dropped by Selina's home as Walter mentioned they'd finally finished it when I saw him at Lucy's store the day before. It looks amazing, and the Kyle's have now officially moved onto the island.

Anyway, now that he's finished this project, he's talking about coming over to see my island in a couple days.

I really don't think he knows what he's in for.

October 7th 2016

Walter and his partner Melissa came by today. I showed them around, not that there was much to show. They were impressed at how big the place was considering it wasn't registered-- though it is now. That's right, you're looking at a legal resident and not a squatter, thank you very much.

As I showed them the place, I told them the only area I didn't want disturbed was the meadow, but they seemed pretty confident they could still create what they wanted in the space allotted so there wasn't an issue.

Walter was very upfront about how much work he reckoned the place needed, considering we have, well, nothing here, but I knew that going into this. Afterwards, when I told Blue, he seemed blissfully unaware of how much needed to be done or that we're going to have to live on the boat whilst there are builders here, so I have that fun conversation to look forward to.

Anyway, back to the build. Melissa asked me about all the sort of features I wanted for it, and aside from a big ass pool, I didn't really have anything else specific in mind. She showed me some rough technical drawings she'd done whilst we had been speaking and they all looked incredible. I told her to go nuts and do whatever she wanted as I figured I'll be happy with whatever she comes up with. Walter came up to me as they were leaving to say that I shouldn't have said that as Melissa apparently has a penchant for marble and gold plated anything, so, I might need Blue to do another dive if my bank account ends up running dry.

October 10th 2016

Went to Cottonwood to speak to Walter today. We had dinner at a nice little restaurant in town as it was getting late and everywhere else was closed. We spoke about logistics, insurance and other fun topics which I don't want to bore myself by repeating, but it looks like construction will be starting in November so that's exciting.

October 11th 2016

~~*I don't*~~

~~*Today was*~~

~~*I*~~

Forget it.

When Clark set his foot onto the dock of Cottonwood, he could feel something was wrong.

Just what that specific 'wrong' was, or why he was feeling it, he couldn't say. All he could figure out was that it felt similar to air before a harsh storm, muggy and oppressive, suffocating even. At the feeling, he debated just going back home and dealing with the lack of supplies as best he could. He'd survived off of less for longer, he figured this would be no different.

As he thought this, he spied Porter inside of his office, and the sight of him alone caused Clark to walk.

Unlike the last time he was inside the shipping office, there were employees bustling around inside who all eyed him curiously as he walked past them all towards Porter's office. The assistant before the door held up her hand, her mouth open to speak but Clark cut her off. "I'm a friend of Porter's." He said easily as he opened the door without knocking.

As the door swung open, Porter looked up from his desk with wide eyes that quickly turned warm upon recognition. “Clark." He smiled. "It’s good to see you. Come in.”

Clark stepped inside and shut the door. He looked at Porter and eyed him warily. “You okay?”

“Am I okay?” Porter repeated, making a face. “Well, sure. Why are you asking?”

“I--” Clark began to say, before shaking his head. “It’s nothing.”

“Come on now." Porter said softly. “I can see you’re not okay yourself. What's the matter?”

Clark pursed his lips, and the more he focused on the feeling across his skin, the more he realised it went deeper, reaching into his stomach and causing it to churn. “I don’t know.” Clark said truthfully. “I just feel sick, and it’s like my skin doesn’t fit and now my stomach is getting all--”

“Whoa, now.” Porter said, holding his hands up. “Sit down, Clark. I’ll grab you some water. Just take deep breaths. I’ll be right back.”

Clark did as he was told, lumbering towards the chair with what felt like every scrap of his energy. He slumped into the seat and began trying to do as he was told; taking deep breaths, but they still came out reedy and shallow no matter how hard he tried. He barely noticed Porter leaving, and only realised he had returned upon feeling a plastic cup being slid into his palm. “Here.” Porter said gently before making his way back to his seat. “Sip on that. It will help.”

Clark didn’t know how much help water would do considering he was certain whatever he was feeling was all in his head. He didn’t get sick. He was physically incapable of it. Unless kryptonite or Blue’s semen was involved, that is. He could safely say neither was a factor here, and yet, he still felt awful even as he began to sip on his water dutifully. Maybe he was sick? “Thanks.” He said under his breath.

Porter nodded, and only when Clark managed to make his way through the cup of water, did he ask. “So, what’s wrong?”

Clark stared at the bottom of the cup, moving it around so that the lone water droplet at the bottom moved from side to side. “I told you. I don’t know,” he muttered. “I just know when I got off my boat I felt like, like--” he tried to comb his mind for the word and found that none felt right.

Despite the downright laughable amount of information on hand, Porter still nodded knowingly, as if the lacklustre amount of words were somehow enough for him. “Is Blue okay?” He asked, seemingly from nowhere.

Clark’s head snapped up at that, and after focusing hard on Blue’s heart beat, he found it, glacially slow and even. *He’s swimming deep today* . “Yeah, he’s fine.” Clark said, raising a brow. “Why’d you ask?”

Porter shrugged. “I thought maybe you two had a fight or something. When me and Yana get into it, it makes me feel all--” Porter didn’t say a word, opting instead to just shiver with a grimace. “But that’s usually ‘cause she’s broadcasting loud and clear that she's upset, too.”

“With the sync?”

“Right.” Porter nodded. “Remember what I told you about how distance affects it? If she’s really upset or scared or worried, even from here, I can feel it. So imagine if you’re feeling crummy already. It’s like feeling it in stereo.”

Clark looked down at the cup once more before crumpling it and throwing it in the trash. “Well, I told you. Me and Blue can’t sync and he’s definitely fine, so it’s not that.”

A flicker of sympathy came across Porter’s face. “Right. Of course, I was just thinking out loud.”

Clark brought his hands together and let out a sigh. “I just wish I knew what it was. If I knew, then it wouldn’t feel so bad, you know?”

“Right.” Porter said, tenting his hands together on his desk. “And let me know if this is off base, but do you think it could be something more… simple. Like, I don’t know, anxiety.”

“Anxiety?” Clark repeated to himself. He poured over the word and its meaning in his mind and after a moment made a face. “Maybe?” He offered after a minute of silence.

“Maybe you got anxious from coming here. Would make sense.” Porter shrugged a shoulder, and with his voice above a whisper continued. “What with Antonio around and all.”

Clark didn’t have the heart to tell Porter that Antonio was in no way someone who would cause him to feel this way. Even when he watched him drag Blue across the sand he only viewed the man as an inconvenience at best. “It’s not Antonio.” Was all he said to that.

“Could be from something else, then. *Someone* else...” Porter's gaze turned sympathetic as he took in Clark’s pitiful expression. “I really wish I could tell you what you were feeling, Clark.”

As he said those words, it only made Clark's mood sour further. Here he was dumping his inexplicable emotions onto Porter and he didn’t even have the decency to meet him halfway with it all. In the end, that expression caused him to speak. “Maybe you are right. I don’t know.”

“I reckon you just need to head on back home, Clark. Take it easy for the day and try coming back another day.”

“Yeah, I thought the same thing, but I'm here now, so…” Clark pressed his lips together. “I'm just gonna try and get everything out of the way today and then head on back.”

“Good call.” Porter said with a nod. As Clark stood, he did too and walked to the door, holding it open for Clark as he looked up at him. “Take care, Clark. I’m here if you need another talk.”

“Thanks, Porter.” Clark said quietly, a genuine smile touching his lips. “Will do.”

He walked out of the building then, receiving only a smattering of stares from the other shipping employees as he did. He made his way out of the marina and hadn’t even made it far up the high street before he heard a voice call his name. Though ‘name’ might be charitable. It was addressed to him, sure, but it wasn’t exactly his name.

“Oi. You.”

Clark stopped, and turned his head by a fraction. He looked to the right and spotted Sal’s shop, open. The building looked the same for the most part, with the shutters up and the windows smeared in what looked like a half-hearted attempt at washing them. What Clark was focused on though was the man who called out to him. He stood in the doorway and for a brief moment Clark could barely recognize them. “Holy shit.” He muttered when the penny did finally drop.

It was Salvator, and to Clark’s dismay, he looked terrible. His eyes were sunken, his hair thin. He still had that same glare he always wore when talking to Clark, but every other part of his expression looked tired and worn. "So freak..." He muttered as he eyed Clark up and down and leaned against the doorway. “Are you still fucking mers?”

“Are *you* still an asshole?” Clark couldn’t help but quip before he took in the withered body before him once more and winced. “I mean--”

Salvator however only waved his hand and even more surprisingly, didn't start yelling. “Don’t say you’re sorry. I know you're not.”

“Well.” Clark said, crossing his arms. “I might be a little bit.” He looked at the man earnestly. “I heard you haven’t been well recently.”

“Oh, what gave me away?” Salvator said, holding his arm up so that the loose fabric of his shirt slid down, showing his thin wrists. “Here I thought I looked like the picture of health.”

Despite the apparent attempt at humour, sardonic or otherwise, Clark didn’t laugh. Didn't even try a fake, awkward one, he just stood there and stared at Salvator until the man lowered his hand and sighed. “Come inside.” Was all he said before he turned and walked in through the doorway.

Clark very nearly didn't follow him. For one, his stomach was still in knots and two, he had a feeling Salvator would be waiting inside with a bat should he even try to set one foot in the premises. Despite all those worries though, Clark eventually began to move towards the building and when he did walk past the doorway, Salvator wasn’t there with a bat and was infact already inside the living room, just through another doorway at the back of the shop.

Clark followed him back there and found him already on the sofa, a shoe box sat beside him. Clark paused at the door, and gave a quick glance around the house. “Where is Marcos?” He asked. The boy was nowhere to be found.

Salvator looked up at him, taking a long breath before speaking. “He went to Redding to get my things and bring them home.”

“Because...” Clark made a face as he tried to find the next words. “You’re... *better*?”

Clark doesn’t recall ever seeing Salvator smile. Even when he had seen him before he was sick, back when he was nothing more than a customer getting his engine serviced, the man always wore a frown so natural Clark wondered if he had been born with it. The smile he was staring at though was one that had Clark wishing for the return of that ever present grimace. “Nope.” Was all he said.

“Then, why--”

Salvator blew a raspberry and looked away. “If your asking why I don't want to spend the last few weeks of my life laying in a hospital bed rather than be at home with my son, you're more of a *pendejo* than I thought.”

“I thought…” but Clark didn't know what he thought. He walked over to the sofa and sat on the one in front of Sal's. His legs suddenly weak.

Salvator was quiet too. His hand was playing with the loose bit of string wrapped around the box beside him and he looked at that rather than Clark as he spoke. “I finished chemo last week and as you can probably already tell, it didn't work. The cancer has spread to my liver and kidneys and they gave me two options, one, I move out of Simmons’ home and into the hospital where I was given an optimistic five percent chance of survival, or two, I go back home and live out the rest of my life here. I chose the latter.”

“Jesus.” Clark muttered to himself as he looked down at his hands. “Why… Why are you telling me this?”

“Because, even if I think you’re a *pendejo*, my son does not. He thinks he’s slick, but I know you were the one who gave him the money to pay for my treatment. I also know that you’re the one that’s been checking up on him whilst I've been away. Despite everything, you’ve been good to my son, and for that I will always be grateful.”

Clark nodded at the words. “Marcos is a good kid.”

“Right, which is why--” Sal reached over and took the box in his hand. He tried to lift it, but when he couldn’t with one hand, he brought his other one down and took the box with both before passing it over to Clark. “I want you to give this to him when I pass.”

“*What?*” Clark looked at Sal, his eyebrows raising. “Sal, I can’t--”

“Yes you can.” Salvator said, leaning back against the sofa and crossing his arms. “I don’t want it here. I don't want Marcos finding it before I die. He must get it after I pass, not before. Understand?”

Clark couldn’t help it, he peered inside the box and found only paper. Even with x-ray vision, he could only see shapes and not writing through objects. “What's inside?” He couldn’t help but ask.

“Something that doesn’t concern you.” Salvator said, his eyes narrowing. “So don’t think about opening, either. Despite everything, I am choosing to trust you. Don’t make me regret it.”

Clark wanted to argue, but in the end, didn’t. He instead snapped his mouth shut and set the box onto the seat beside him. “Alright. Is that all you wanted from me?”

“Yes.” Salvator waved his hand to the open doorway. “You can go now.”

Clark couldn’t help but roll his eyes as he was ushered away. “Right, of course. I'll be on my way.” He stood up and took the box into his hands.

By the doorway, he turned back to Sal and gave a crisp nod. “Be seeing you, Sal.”

That same wane smile from earlier reappeared. “Somehow, I doubt that.”

He left not long after, stepping out of the store and into the bright light of day. Somehow, the sun felt harsher than it had earlier and despite the warmth it usually infused Clark with, right now, it only left him cold.

After taking a few breaths he felt a little better, but that feeling soon evaporated as he continued his way up the street toward Lucy’s. He tried to ignore the way his stomach wriggled with each step but eventually it was too much and he ducked into an alley and crumpled over heaving. Nothing came out, but as Clark stared at the small puddle of his own salvia on the concrete he told himself he *must* be sick. He didn’t know how, or why, but he was sick, and he just needed to buy his things and then leave and figure all this out once he was safe at home.

He got up with a stumble in his step and left the alley, making his way slowly toward Lucy's. Once there, he stopped before the door and it took him a minute to take in what was different.

They were closed.

Clark stared at the sign showing the word ‘closed’ for a while before he tried the handle. It was unlocked.

He opened it slowly, and when the bell jingled, the person at the counter’s head rocketed it up. “Barbara?”

Clark stood for a moment taking in the sight that was Lucy. Her glasses were gone, revealing her eyes red and raw. Her hair had more in common with a bird's nest and her face was what really caught Clark; hopeful, before crumpling into a mask of disappointment upon recognition. “Oh. Hello Clark.”

“Luce.” Clark said slowly approaching the counter. “What happened?”

Clark saw the way Lucy's lips pressed together, as though she were trying to keep the words inside of her bottled up, but after a few seconds, those lips began to waver and fresh tears came from her eyes. “Barbara left.”

“What?” Clark asked, his brows furrowing together. “How, why, what did--”

Lucy brought her hands to her face, attempting to wipe the tears away. “That no good boy got to her. Turned her against me. Now she thinks *I'm* the bad guy. She said she doesn't ever wanna see me again.”

“Luce, I'm sure…” Clark paused, waiting for the rest of the words to come. “I’m sure Barbara didn’t mean that, you know teens, Hell, one time I was so mad at my mama--”

“ *This* is different.” Lucy snapped, though the anger was fleeting as her sombre expression soon returned. “I'm sorry, Clark. I know you mean well, but I just need to be alone right now.”

Clark pressed his lips together and nodded. “Sure Luce, I didn’t mean to pry. I'll get out of your hair.”

But just as Clark’s hand touched the door handle he heard Lucy exhale. “Wait.” When he turned he saw her eyes now frantic and on him. “Could you… just check on her? I know she’s up at the Kyle’s home. Just, I don’t know, poke your head in and make sure she’s okay. Please?”

Clark didn’t even hesitate. Even if he felt like shit, this was something that he needed to do. “Of course, Luce.” He tried for a smile, though he wasn’t sure it came across as one. “Take care.”

He stepped outside and looked up the street, towards the house that he knew was tucked away at the very end of it. Even as his stomach continued to writhe, he marched on. Even when he had to fall into another alley to dry heave, he kept going.

With an awful bout of grim clarity, he realised the feeling was only getting worse the more he walked. The further up the street he went, the more it felt like his insides were being ripped apart.

But, he couldn’t go back now, not after promising he’d at least check on Barbara. He could do it by just standing outside, x-ray vision and all that, he wouldn’t need to actually go inside. With that thought, he pushed on and when he finally got to the gates of the home, he found them closed and locked.

He looked in between the metal bars, and saw no one was outside. He did a quick scan of the house and found the family all sitting in the living room, a distraught Barbara amongst them. *Is this really enough?* He wondered to himself. Or should he actually speak with her to satiate Lucy's worries? He didn't know at first, but slowly he found his hand moving and he pushed on the intercom button and waited.

He watched as the family inside stilled. After the second buzz, Selina stood up and approached the intercom. Her finger pressed against the button. "Hello?"

"Selina." Clark said in the general direction of the microphone. "It's Clark."

The silence that followed was astounding. All Clark could hear was the tinny whine of electricity coming from the speaker and then, so quietly Clark wondered if Selina had intended for him to hear, he heard a quiet. "Oh my God."

The next voice he heard wasn't audible through the intercom, but Clark still heard it all the same. Jason burst off the sofa, waving his arms around emphatically. "I told you! I fucking told you!"

"No…" Selina muttered, her hands going towards her mouth, covering it. "No, he might be here for something else..." Selina whirled on Jason, tears springing from her eyes. "You don't know that it was him, Jason. We can't risk it!"

Clark felt his head throb, and as though his body was no longer his own, he fell to the floor and groaned as the voice he heard grew warped and indistinct, like a radio with poor signal. 'Mo-, plea-e, ev-n yo- ca-'t -e s- bli-d. Af-er e-erythi-g w-'v- hea-d, y-u re--ly thin- -e's i--oce-t? Ev-n if h- di-n't t-ke T-m, h-'s go- anot-er b-ack f-n a-d -ou kn-w -t! S-ade sa-d so him--lf!'

'J-y.' Another voice said through the static. 'C-me on, h- mi-ht -ust--'

Suddenly, the voices and pain stopped and Clark took deep breaths as he watched wide eyes as the teen ran from the living room towards the foyer and threw open the front doors, pointing at Clark from across the way. " *You* ." He yelled, his face bright with fury. "You are fucking dead. You hear me? *Dead!* "

The pain he felt only grew as he watched that vitriol filled face. “What?” He muttered, too weak to say anything else.

“Don’t act dumb. We know what you did, and you are gonna pay!”

“But, I was just--” but Clark couldn’t get the rest of the words out as his stomach cramped. He couldn’t continue, he scrambled to his feet and began to hobble away as fast as he could, and yet, no matter how fast he walked he still heard Jason’s voice yelling from behind.

“Yeah, you better run, we’re coming for you. You have no idea who you fucking messed with. You piece of shit!”

The further he went the quieter those yells became. Eventually Clark heard Jason retreat back inside and when he did he stopped along the street and tried to understand what just happened.

He knew Jason didn’t like him. That was abundantly obvious on the few occasions he’d actually spoken to him, but he couldn’t for the life of him figure out what *that* was. The voices he thought he heard, those snippets of a conversation that didn’t sound like it was for him to hear. He tried to parse what he could from what he remembered, but right now, he was far too gone to do anything of the sort.

He didn’t even realise he was back at the docks until he heard his feet beat against the wooden planks. He was barely paying attention as he hopped onto his boat and tucked the box in his arms away in his closet and started the engine. All he did know was that the further away from the island he went, the more the tension in his stomach eased, the more normal he began to feel.

Well, he still felt like shit, but it was a different kind of shit from earlier at least.

When he got back home, he docked and hopped off his boat and then made his way to his desk where he sat for what felt like hours staring at his journal as he tried to express what happened today and found that in the end, he couldn’t.

When he heard Blue come onto shore he couldn’t get up from the desk fast enough. He spied him on the damp sand from the doorway as he called out to Clark. Clark didn’t know what compelled him,

but he ran out of the building and rushed across the sand, falling to the ground and pressing himself against Blue with all his might.

The mer didn't seem to mind the sudden burst of affection, and even looked smug as Clark pulled back, though the expression soon shifted to one of concern when Clark remained quiet.

"I had an awful day today..." Clark muttered as he brought this hand up and wiped his face. "Just… awful…"

Blue frowned as he brought his hands up. 'W H A T H A P P E N E D?'

Clark blew a raspberry. "Beats me. The world just decided I was it's dumping ground, apparently."

At those words, Blue leant in close and pressed his lips against Clark's forehead. He then pulled back and signed. 'I ' L L M A K E Y O U F E E L B E T T E R.'

But Clark only let out a sign. "I don't wanna have sex right now, B."

Blue rolled his eyes and surprisingly didn't hit Clark like he half expected him to. Instead, he only touched his wrist and then began to move towards the cabin.

Clark got the hint and stood up to follow him. Once inside he found Blue already on the bed and once more Clark sighed. "Blue, what did I *just* say?"

But Blue wasn't moving his body like he usually would to try and convince Clark that despite everything, sex was indeed a good idea. He instead began tapping the empty area beside him on the bed and despite his better judgement, Clark approached and laid down there.

Almost immediately, Blue's arms circled around his head, his body curling in close and his head resting just on top of Clarks. To most, it might feel suffocating, but to Clark it felt surprisingly secure. As though no matter where he looked or moved, Blue would be there, comforting him. He closed his eyes for what felt like a moment, but the soft breeze combined with Blue's gentle touch had him asleep in minutes.

Today was a write off. He thought to himself as he slowly fell unconscious. *Tomorrow will be better. I know it will be.*

Chapter End Notes

flops onto the floor in a puddle of my own tears Hey gang!

I know it's been a month, but uni and work are really kicking my butt rn. It's reading week currently (which is like half term but with course work, because university) and I busted this out today and hope to get the next chapter written at some point this week, too. I'm meant to be doing a project during this time... but... I don't wanna XD

Anyway, I hope the mystery and intrigue makes up for the wait. Thing's are starting to heat up at Cottonwood... Who knows what's happening and why?

As always, let me know your thoughts and theories! They really make my day. Take care and I'll see you all next time x

Chapter 31

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 12th 2016

Clark slept soundly throughout the night and when he awoke the next morning, Blue was no longer beside him.

He wasn't exactly surprised. Blue nocturnal nature meant that he often went out into the ocean for late night swims should the mood take him and it wasn't unlike him to stay out even when the sun began to rise.

Clark swung his legs off the side of the bed and stretched out. He felt good. Great even.

Then he remembered yesterday.

It was like a bucket of ice water. All at once, his good mood evaporated and he was left to wonder what exactly he had done to deserve this.

The Salvator situation was one thing. Even though he wasn't close with the man, he was with his son, and the idea that Marcos was going to be losing his father sometime soon was not something Clark knew how to deal with in the slightest.

Then there was Lucy. The woman Clark knew was not the sort to break down easily, and yet there she was, crying in the dark as she waited for her niece to return.

Then of course there was Barbara herself. Hiding in a home that caused Clark's insides to want to spill out the closer he got to it.

He still couldn't place that feeling. All he knew was that it was unlike anything he'd felt in recent memory; a wall of dread that smothered his entire being. His whole body had betrayed him. His mind had been a static filled mess. It was awful. Yet, Clark continued to dwell on it, because through that miasma of suffering he thought he'd heard something.

'Mo-, plea-e, ev-n yo- ca-'t -e s- bli-d. Af-er e-erythi-g w-'v- hea-d, y-u re--ly thin- -e's i--oce-t? Ev-n if h- di-n't t-ke T-m, h-'s go- anot-er b-ack f-n a-d -ou kn-w -t! S-ade sa-d so him--lf!'

It sounded like Jason, but it was different, as though he were speaking through an old fashioned radio, replete with tinny reception and cut outs. He tried to understand it. Maybe he imagined it? A hallucination maybe? Or maybe he was developing telepathy? With all the powers he already had, he wouldn't exactly be surprised if a new one came along.

But that word. That one word specifically. Something about it reminded him of a conversation. *Could it be…?*

The more he thought, the more Porter's words came back to him. *It couldn't be that… Surely…*

'I told you. Me and Yana are syncing right now, it's how I can hear her. She speaks… I guess you can call it telepathically, but it's like I was saying to you about the radio signals. She gives off these signals that I can understand and I talk back to her the same way, or verbally, either way she understands me because of the sync.'

But…

I'm not part mer…

And Hell, even if I could sync. That would mean… that would mean the Kyle's….

"Holy shit." Clark muttered to himself. "No, they can't be…"

Clark's mind began to race. "But that would mean..." He muttered to himself, bringing his hands to his head as though trying to soothe the thoughts boiling around inside of it.

'...You can only sync with your own species, after all.'

'...Has he ever tried to sync with you?'

'...So he tried to activate your sync, and it didn't work…'

Clark's hands fell down to his sides as his stare remained glued to the wall. He hadn't blinked in over two minutes, and yet, his eyes still remained fixed in place as his mind whirled. *If Blue had somehow managed to activate my sync, that would mean I'd only be able to sync with his kin. So if I had synced with Jason, that would have to mean the Kyle's are…*

"They're blackfins." He let out. "Holy shit. They're blackfins." Clark burst from his bed and ran outside. "Blue!" He called out frantically looking around the beach for the mer. "*Blue* !"

But Blue wasn't out in the water or under his jetty. He was in his pool and when Clark turned his attention there, the energy brought on from his revelation vanished immediately. "Blue?" He whispered.

Clark all but ran to the pool and when he got there he gingerly lifted the edge of the tarp up. His eyes immediately blew wide at the sight of the mer huddled in a corner, shaking. "Blue?" He called out again, splashing his hand across the surface to grab his attention. "Blue, baby what's wrong?"

He knew he had been heard, could see that from Blue's ears twitching in the water. He didn't move though and Clark found his heart starting to hammer. He pulled the tarp completely off and jumped into the shallow pool, wading over to the mer and lifting him up to the surface. "Blue, baby, talk to me. What's wrong?"

Out of the water, the mer let out what could only be described as the longest and loudest scream he had made in recent memory. Clark winced at the sound and only when he finally quieted down, did Clark carry Blue out of the water and set him down on the ground. "Come on, B. Use your signs. What's wrong?"

Blue let out another groan, and with what looked like an enormous effort, extracted his arms from around his midsection and held up his hands. He then extended the index fingers of both and brought them together. 'I N P A I N.'

“Shit.” Clark muttered. “Where is the pain? Rib or…?” *Please don’t be ‘or’.*

‘S T O M A C H.”

Clark felt his own drop. “Like before?” He muttered.

Blue’s hand curled into a fist as he nodded. ‘Y E S.’

Fuck fuck fuck. Clark looked around the area, as if something around them would somehow answer his prayers. When nothing did, he scooped Blue back up and headed into the cabin. He set him on the bed and immediately went about grabbing the hot water bottle. He rushed to the boat to fill it, then when that was done, he returned and handed it to Blue. The relief on his face was noticeable as he pressed it against his stomach, and with that small mercy, Clark went about grabbing him some painkillers.

After swallowing the pills, Clark allowed himself to relax just a touch. Blue still looked to be in great pain, but eventually, the lines on his face lessened and he even took to looking up at Clark with a wan smile. Clark looked at the bottle resting on his stomach, watching how the muscle there still twitched. “Is it worse or better than last time?”

Blue made a face. He let go of the bottle, but gravity kept it in place on his stomach. With his index and middle finger splayed out in V’s, he crossed his hands together. ‘W O R S E.’

Clark closed his eyes, mostly because he didn’t want to see Blue’s eyes as he spoke. “I don’t know what to suggest, B. This is a recurring thing, right? We can safely assume it isn't food poisoning, which means it has to be something bad.”

When he cracked open his eyes, he saw his own expression mirrored on Blue. That same grim look of uncertainty. After a minute, he gestured some more. ‘I T W I L L G O A W A Y.’

Clark however only frowned at the words. “Yeah, but what if it *keeps* getting worse? It might go away in a few days, sure, but what about next time?”

Blue looked like he wanted to roll his eyes at Clark's concern, but just as he was about to, his eyes blew wide and another scream left his lips. His whole abdomen seemed to shudder and he curled to his side, vomiting the contents of his stomach up, including the two partially dissolved pills. "Shit." Clark muttered as he rushed to Blue side. He didn't even care about the bedding, he just wanted to try and fix whatever was going on here. He blew cold air onto his hand and pressed it against Blue's forehead. He was burning up. "I don't know what to do, B. Tell me what to do."

But in that moment, Blue was incapable of doing anything other than writhe and groan. Clark watched him, and despite everything he found himself standing up. He could only think of one thing to do and he prayed to God he wouldn't regret doing it.

He went to his desk and pulled open the drawer. Inside, he found his phone and contact book. He opened up the pages and inside he found what he was looking for. A sleek looking business card. He reread the words on it until they all blurred into one another and only when he heard Blue heave once more did he get pulled from his reverie and begin typing the numbers written on the card into his phone.

Am I really about to do this?

~~*What if Blue dies because of something you could have prevented? You have no choice and you know it.*~~

But what if…?

~~*What? If he tries something? You're Superman Goddamnit.*~~

The phone began to ring, and even though a small part of Clark was praying it would ring out, he was somewhat relieved when he heard a quiet voice on the other end. "Hello?"

"Dr. Hadal?" Clark asked, turning his head by a fraction to look at Blue. His face was scrunched up into a tight frown as he took reedy breaths. "It's Clark."

There was a moment of silence in which Clark was well aware Elijah was racking his brain for his

name. That moment was brief though, as very soon a cheery voice filled his ear. “Clark! Oh my, how wonderful for you to call. How have you been?”

“I’ve been better doc, look I won’t--” as he spoke, Blue let out another ear splitting scream. He brought his hand to cover the receiver but was sure some of the sound managed to get through. When the mer quieted down, Clark brought the phone backup to his ear, “--bore you with details. Blue is in pain-- *severe* pain-- and I don’t know what to do. You know about blackfins and you’re a doctor so you’re my only hope here.”

The silence was back again, but Clark could practically hear Elijah’s heartbeat thumping over the phone line in place of words, could hear how desperately he was trying to keep his voice even when he finally spoke. “Of course. I would be delighted to look him over for you. All you need to do is come to my lab and I'll give him a thorough examination. Whatever is causing his pain; we will figure it out.”

Clark let out a sigh, he assumed it was in relief, but maybe it was just from Elijah being so unabashedly Elijah. “Thanks doc.” He ended up saying. “Speaking of your lab, you didn’t put any coordinates on your card. How am I gonna find you?”

“Right." Elijah said. “I’m currently in my mobile lab. I have a few around the place you see, but as I’m currently exploring a remote region of the ocean, I’m using the mobile one. I'll give you my current coordinates. Just be sure to arrive soon as I move the lab around as a safety precaution and my coordinates will of course change when I do.”

Clark didn’t even have time to unpack how sketchy all that sounded and instead pulled out a pen. “Give ‘em to me.”

There was the sound of movement on the other end of the line as fabric brushed over the receiver. It took a minute, but eventually Clark heard Elijah once more. A string of numbers left his lips and with each one Clark’s hand moved across the page. Once finished, he stared down at the finished coordinates and gave a nod. “Alright. See you soon, doc.”

“Take care, Clark.” Was the man's response and then came the sound of the dial tone.

Clark didn’t even bother getting dressed. He ended up wearing the same clothes he’d worn yesterday; the same ones he had fallen asleep in. They were a tad musty but he just couldn’t bring himself to care. He then went to his bed and pulled out the tub from underneath and rushed to fill it. Back in the

cabin, he came in close to Blue and eased him into his arms. The mer protested at first, hissing as Clark's hands went near his tender stomach, but Clark just shushed him quietly, kissing his forehead. "It's okay, hon. I got you."

He eased the mer into the tub and then lifted him and began to walk towards his boat. Once inside, he set Blue down in the main cabin and went to the wheel to start up the boat. He turned towards Blue and watched him for a moment. His eyes were open now but he was looking around the boat as though confused. Clark however didn't have time to explain what was happening, he just had to get moving.

He headed out with a rough bearing and once they were off, he imputed the coordinates Elijah had given him into his navigator. It took a minute to process, and when it did, Clark looked at the map. It was going to be a lengthy trip, three hours by the looks of it, but Clark didn't care. If it meant helping Blue, he'd sail until the end of time if need be.

After the first hour, Blue seemed more with it. He wasn't yelping in pain constantly, though he was still hissing from time to time. At one point he tried to get out of the tub, to which Clark quickly approached him. "Stay in the tub." He said sternly. "Don't move around too much. You'll make things worse."

Blue let out another whine but put his arms back down, resigning himself to the tub. Clark turned back to the wheel.

A few minutes later, he heard a chirp and when Clark turned around, he saw Blue's hands moving. 'W H E R E A R E W E G O I N G?'

Clark winced. He had hoped this wouldn't come up. He thought about lying or omitting certain things. Afterall, Blue wasn't aware of Elijah's… obsession. If he phrased it right, Hell, he might even be eager to get examined by him. "We're going to a doctor." He said slowly. "A doctor who knows about blackfins. He's gonna take a look at you."

When he chanced a look at Blue, he was only slightly surprised by his horrified expression. The mer shook his head and tried to get out of the tub once more. "No no, come on." Clark huffed, rushing to his side and trying to keep him in place. "I'm not gonna let him hurt you, okay? He's just gonna give you a once over. Then we're gonna go home."

Blue was still frowning but he wasn't trying to escape anymore at least. 'P R O M I S E?' he signed.

“Of course, I promise.” Clark said, leaning forward and kissing him. “Now take it easy, we’ll be there before you know it.”

For better or for worse, Blue was quiet the rest of the trip. When they were near their destination, Clark kept his eye out for Elijah's lab somewhere along the horizon, but it never appeared. Even when he was right on top of the blinking red light on his navigation console, there was still nothing. “The Hell…” Clark muttered, but one quick look underneath his boat answered his question before he even asked him.

A massive structure was below them, and Clark's eyes blew wide as he took it all in. It was huge and Clark couldn’t help but gasp when he saw something rising in the water from it.

It was a long cylindrical tube and Clark realised belatedly it was a periscope. It poked out of the water and turned towards his boat. “Clark?” He heard a voice ask. There were two speakers on either side of the eyepiece and Clark found himself waving at it. “Wonderful, there you are! I can’t hear you from this so don’t bother speaking. I just need you to move your boat back about one hundred yards and then I'll surface.”

Clark nearly responded before remembering what Elijah had just said. He instead did as he was told, starting the engine once more and looping back around on himself, going until he was clear of the large vessel.

Once he was clear, the periscope lowered and it took another five minutes before Clark began to feel a rumble coming from the water. All at once, water tumbled towards his boat and after the rocking had subsided, there in and amongst the waves was a large submarine. The hatchway on the side of the sail pop open, and a figure appeared from within. “Ahoy ahoy!” Elijah yelled from across the water as he ushered Clark forward with his hand. “Please, pull your boat in close and I'll extend the walkway for you.”

Clark once again did as he was told and pulled in alongside the open hatchway. Once there, Elijah pressed a button by his side and slowly, a metal walkway extended from the opening, coming out until it was in line with the door to Clark's boat. “Open your door and push it down until it touches the floor.” Elijah called out.

Clark went to the doorway and opened it. The metal walkway was at eye level and once the door was out of the way, the walkway came forward by a few more inches before stopping. Then, Clark pushed

the walkway down until it touched the floor of his boat. It was surprisingly easy to manoeuvre. Once it was completely down Clark stood back up and saw Elijah ushering him once more. “Come come. Time's a wastin’, as the youths say!”

Clark wondered if it was too late to back out, but one look at Blue laying limping in the tub told him the answer to that. He went and picked him up before walking back to the open doorway and making his way onto the sub. Once he was inside, he gave an appreciative whistle as he looked around. “Nice place, doc.”

“Thank you!” Elijah said with a warm smile. “I can give you the tour later if you’d like, but for now, follow me down to the lab.” He shut the door and then walked in front of Clark to lead him down the steps, though not before staring at Blue with barely contained glee.

If Clark thought the place was big from outside, he clearly had no idea how big it would be once he was actually inside. It took a good five minutes to get to the lab from the sail, and it looked like they had taken the most direct route there. Clark didn’t even want to fathom what was in the rest of the place.

Once they were in the lab, Clark spied a series of large tanks as well as medical equipment on either side of the room. The tanks were empty and the equipment looked innocuous enough, but Clark still grimaced at the implication. *You’re Superman.* He reminded himself. *He tries anything, you throw him through a wall.*

Elijah tapped the examination table in the middle of the room and then gestured to Clark. “Please, set him down on here. Then I'll begin.”

Clark set the tub down and then reached for Blue. The mer let out a quiet whine, right into Clark's ear and despite the lack of sign language, Clark understood the sound for what it meant. “Don’t worry,” he whispered. “I won’t let him hurt you.”

He walked over to the table and set Blue down before stepping back ever so slightly. When he did, he turned to Elijah and didn’t miss how wide and glassy his eyes had become.

“Oh my…” Elijah let out, his voice so light and airy Clark could imagine it floating were it physical. His eyes trailed up and down Blue, his hands fidgeting at his sides like a child's might in a toy store, eager to touch and experience, and yet knowing that they weren't allowed. At least, not yet.

Clark appreciated that. He didn't know how he'd respond if Elijah started manhandling Blue without so much as asking beforehand. He knew it was coming though, so there was no surprise when Elijah sent his pleading eyes towards Clark and pressed his hands together as though in prayer. "May I?"

Clark looked at Blue and the mer looked right back. Neither were particularly happy with the situation, Blue especially if the amount he was grumbling was anything to go by and yet they both knew why they were here, why they *had* to come here. "Yeah, sure, just--" Clark pressed his lips together. "Go slow or he might start swinging."

Elijah nodded rapidly and after quickly donning a pair of gloves, all of a sudden those hands that had been fidgeting were out and on Blue. They were on his tail for now, and Blue flicked it once at the touch but otherwise made no attempts to dissuade him. Not that he was really able to. Despite Clark's comment, given the amount of pain Blue was presumably in, he doubted there would be a whole lot of 'swinging', even if Elijah went too far. "He's even more magnificent than I imagined..." Elijah whispered as his hand trailed higher. "His colouring, his physicality, he's definitely pure."

"Right." Clark said, grimacing at the word. It turned out that no amount of time between hearing Elijah say it was long enough and he still found himself frowning as he did the first time it graced his ears. After watching Elijah fawn for a few more moments, Clark cleared his throat. "His stomach." He said, staring pointedly at the area.

It took a while for the words to sink in, but when they did, Elijah jolted back, his eyes wide. "Right! Of course." He said, his hands quickly went to Blue's stomach and despite his growls, the mer still moved his arms away when Elijah started pressing into the skin. "Usually, I'd ask if it hurts when I press but I can figure it out with a mer by--"

As Elijah pressed in one particular spot, Blue yelped, falling back onto the table with a whine. Elijah kept pressing the area, gentler this time and watched Blue face intently as he did. "Interesting." He muttered. He then looked up at Clark. "I'll need to do a more thorough examination to figure out what exactly is causing the pain…" He turned away from them both, going to the side of the room and approaching a piece of machinery there. Clark recognised it, though at the moment, couldn't remember where from. "Ultrasound will be the best way for us to see how things are going on inside there." Elijah said as he wheeled the machine close to the table.

"*Ultrasound* ?" Clark muttered to himself.

'Have you ever had an ultrasound before, Mrs. Kent?'

‘Nope, first one! I sort of know what to expect, though. My friends have warned me about the cold jelly.’

‘Have they now? I will say they were right, it’s going to be a little cold at first but after a little time, it will warm up.’

All of a sudden, Clark felt faint, and without a word he found a chair nearby and fell into it, watching from afar as he took several breaths. *Don’t think about that. Not now.*

Blue definitely missed his presence if the way he turned his head towards him and started chirping was anything to go by, even Elijah was pulled from his reverie by the sound of laboured breathing and curled his head in Clark’s direction. “You alright there, Clark?”

“Yeah, just feel a little faint is all...” He thought he might try to stand again but didn’t trust himself, so he waved the two of them off. Ignoring Blue’s concerned stare. “I'll watch from here, so you do what you gotta do.”

Elijah did just that. He took the transducer and smeared jelly along the surface before bringing it to Blue’s belly. He then turned it on and almost immediately, the sound was what hit Clark and it had him shoving his head into his hands as he tried to block it out.

God, how could a sound leave him so breathless?

‘Right there. Do you see him?’

Oh God, please no.

‘Holy shit! Lois, lookit him. He’s--’

Please, no, please don’t do this. I can’t--

‘He’s so small! He’s like a little jelly bean.’

‘Maybe it is a jelly bean. You ain’t a hundred of ‘em before we got here.’

‘Shut up.’

‘So, have you already decided on a name?’

Stop it. Stop it. Stop it.

‘If it’s a girl, Ella, after my mother and if it’s a boy, we’re thinking--’

“Clark!”

Clark’s head shot up at the sound and in that moment all he could register was the look of fear on Blue’s face, and the bewilderment on Elijah's. “Are you alright? You were hyperventilating.”

“I--” Clark swallowed down the bile rising in his throat. “I was?”

“Yes, do you want to lie down? I have a bed in my office just off of the lab if you need it." Elijah jerked his head towards the ajar door to his left, but Clark only shook his head.

“No no.” He said. “I’m fine. Keep going.”

“Well, that's just it.” Elijah pulled back and set down the transducer. “I’m done.”

That was enough to override the tumultuous state of Clark’s thoughts and he rose from his chair, on only slightly shaky legs. “Oh?” He let out as he approached the table once more. He reached for Blue’s hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. “What is it?”

Elijah was attempting to hold back his smile. “It’s not appendicitis or gallstones.”

“Oh, that’s good.” Clark sighed.

“Indeed.” He said with a crisp nod. “It’s just his womb that’s causing him distress.”

“Okay, that’s--” but Clark stopped, his palms suddenly clammy. “His what now?”

“His womb.” Elijah repeated. He then took in Clark’s blank expression and inhaled sharply in realisation. “Wait. You didn’t know?”

“Didn’t know what.” Clark said, his eyes getting wider. “Start making sense, doc.”

“Why he’s…” Elijah gestured his hand towards Blue’s stomach. “He’s pregnant.”

Clark however still wasn’t computing. “He’s what now?”

“Pregnant.”

“Not following.”

“With child.”

“Still nothing.”

“He’s expecting.”

“Can you--”

“Clark!” Elijah said with a laugh. “How are you not understanding this? Your mer is pregnant!”

“Right.” Clark said, his eyes growing wider, if that were possible. “See, that’s the thing, doc. He’s a man. I too, for the record, am also a man. So I am just very confused as to why you seem to think he is pregnant.”

“Well, I was too at first, but the ultrasound definitely shows he has a womb and is pregnant and the more I thought about it, the more I began to remember my research and slowly it all began to make sense.”

“Your… *research* ?” Clark asked tentatively.

Elijah looked up at him, his eyes glittering. “Tell me, Clark, what do you know about clownfish?”

Clark made a face. “Let's say nothing.”

“That’s fair. Not a lot of people do.” Elijah peeled off his gloves and threw them into the nearby trash can. “You see, when the dominant female clownfish in a family dies, the dominant male begins a biological process in which it’s sex changes. Once complete, they will then take the original female's place in the family.” Elijah leant back against the counter, his eyes cast wistfully upwards. “It is a truly remarkable adaptive trait. So long as there are at least two fish left, one of them will simply become female and then all of a sudden, what looks like extinction, isn’t. My theory and what most of my research has been based on is that prehistoric mers had this trait; and that abyssal fins and by extension, some black fins, have it, whereas all other mer species lost it.”

“Okay. But Blue is--” Clark looked at the mer and wondered how much of this he was getting. Judging by his confused expression, not much. “He still looks like--”

“Oh, well of course." Elijah said, swatting his hand. “He’s not going to grow breasts or anything. Externally, he’ll remain largely the same, it's simply a shift in his internal organs that is occurring. You see, it’s my belief that mers with this ability are born with the crude genitals of the other sex, and should the biological trigger of there being no other member of the opposite sex occur, the crude genitals begin to develop. In, what was his name again, Blue?” At Clark’s nod, he continued. “In

Blue's case, it must have occurred years ago as his uterus is fully formed and he is capable of pregnancy. If his pod only recently passed his uterus would still be in its primitive, underdeveloped state."

"Years ago, huh?" Clark said blankly.

At Clark's expression, Elijah offered another small laugh. "I mean, you can't have been completely blind to this, surely. With how long you've been together, I'm surprised you never noticed his menstrual cycles. His heats as well as the cramping he'd have felt as his uterine lining was reabsorbed into his system would have been a monthly occurrence."

Upon hearing the words, suddenly, a whole lot of things began to make more sense. "The pain." Clark said slowly. "The monthly pain. That would have been--"

"The uterine reabsorption, yes." Elijah nodded. "That's how it works in mers. Humans are actually rather unique with expelling the lining every month. A waste of energy and iron if you ask me. The mer's solution is far more elegant; they simply reabsorb it into their system if they don't fall pregnant."

"Then why is he in pain now? If you're saying he's… he's--" Clark snapped his lips together, unable to finish the sentence.

"Well, even though his uterus is fully developed, you have to understand that these crude genitals are never going to be exactly the same as how they'd be in the opposite sex. They're smaller for one, are cramped into a place where there isn't much room for expansion. The womb is trying to make room for itself and the eggs and in doing so, it's pushing against muscle lining and nerves. He won't have to deal with it for long though, two more months and he'll lay the eggs and they'll hatch five months after that. With proper pain management, he'll be fine."

"Eggs?" Clark said, his face falling. "He'll lay *eggs* ?"

"Well, of course." Elijah said, with a shake of head. "You really don't know much about mers, do you?"

“No, I do not. Now will you explain the whole 'eggs' thing, please?” After saying the sentence, Clark felt his mouth dry. “Also, eggs. As in plural? *Plural?* ”

“Yes, I picked up three eggs during the scan. Of course there is no way of knowing sex at this point, but there were definitely three in there.”

“Oh, good God." Clark let out, bringing his hands to his mouth. “This is insane, how the Hell did this even happen?”

Elijah pressed his lips together. “You had unprotected sex, obviously.”

“Okay, but I didn’t realise he could get pregnant!” Clark threw his arms out, looking straight at the Doctor. “Like how was I meant to know that? God, I can’t even *think* right now...”

“Right, I can imagine this is a lot to take in.” Elijah said as he pulled away from the cabinet he was leaning on and gesturing back towards the seat Clark had been sitting on before. “Why don’t you take a seat? I just have a few more checks to do to make sure there is nothing else wrong with him.”

Despite the allure of the chair, he turned back to Elijah, raising an eyebrow. “Checks?”

“Simple examinations. They won't be invasive and they won’t take too long.” Elijah said coolly.

Clark wanted to object. After all, he was told what he needed to know, but then again, what if there was something else wrong that the ultrasound didn’t pick up on? He’d hate to be the one at fault because he simply didn’t want Elijah to keep touching Blue. In the end, he went to the chair, but instead of sitting on it where it was. He grabbed it, and brought it right next to Blue. He then set it down and sat back on it. “Okay. Go for it.”

Elijah didn’t look perturbed by Clark’s proximity and simply put on another pair of gloves. “Okay, first things first…” he muttered to himself as he went across the room and opened the cabinet there. It was then that Clark saw it wasn’t a cabinet, it was a fridge and whilst there were a few unidentified specimens inside, there was also a freezer compartment at the top and that is what Elijah opened. He took out a tray and Clark found himself raising a brow at it.

“Ice cubes?”

“Yes, it’s for one of my tests.” Elijah said as he went about cracking the tray and removing a cube. He walked back to the examination table and then opened the book that was sitting on top of the counter to the side. He then turned back to the mer. “Okay.” He muttered as he placed the cube on the meat of Blue’s flank.

Blue didn’t even flinch at the cold and very slowly, Elijah began moving the cube around in tight circles. Clark wondered what the test was meant to show, but after a minute and with the cube now nearly completely melted, Elijah pulled it away. His eyes blew wide as he looked at the spot the cube had been on and he quickly turned back around and began to write in his journal like a man possessed.

Clark pressed his lips together at the display and with Elijah's back to him, he stood up to better see the area the man had been looking at.

That was when he noticed what Elijah was presumably writing about.

“His skin…” Clark said quietly. “It’s--”

“Changed colour.” Elijah said with a sharp series of nods as he kept writing. “Thermochromism. It changed when it got cold.”

“Huh.” Clark said as he sat back down. That made sense. He had noticed in the past that Blue’s scales shifted colour if he had been swimming in deeper, cooler, water. That was it though, they weren’t just darker. “They’re black.”

“Uh huh.” Elijah said, still focused on writing.

Clark raised a brow at the man. “Is that what they’re meant to look like?”

“Hum.”

Clark opened his mouth to ask what exactly the man was writing, but he got the feeling he would only get another noncommittal grunt. That in and of itself was surprising given Elijah's penchant for waxing poetic for hours about his research should he be given the opportunity, yet here Clark was, trying to engage with the man and getting nothing.

When Elijah set down his pen, he didn’t even pause as he reached for the machine hanging above the table and pulled it down. “X-ray. We will need to leave the room whilst it’s on.”

“Right.” Clark said as he looked at the machine, then at Blue. “Is… is that safe? If he’s…”

“The small amount of radiation from the scan won’t harm the eggs, no.” Elijah then gestured towards another doorway leading out of the lab. “Follow me. You'll need to wait in here whilst it’s on. Tell him he needs to be still during the scan.”

Clark waited until Elijah was walking away before taking Blue’s hand in his own and squeezing it. “I’ll be right back, okay?” He then pointed to the machine hanging above Blue. “This is gonna look at your insides, so keep still whilst it's on.”

Blue gave a shallow nod before lying back on the metal surface. Clark gave his hand another squeeze before following Elijah out of the room and into the next.

It was an extension of the lab by the looks of it, with more tanks and a few more pieces of machinery. Though it was what was in the middle of the room that took Clark's attention. It was a large tank, roughly fifteen cubic meters in size, with a large mechanical lid on top and an even larger mechanical base. There was a keypad and monitor as well as a series of wires and circuits on one side. Clark approached it whilst Elijah stood at the X-ray console and typed.

“Doc, what is this tank for?” He asked as he looked it over. It was far more complex than the simple glass ones on either side of the room. In fact, this one didn’t even appear to be made of glass, its walls made of far thicker and sturdier stuff.

“Hum?” Elijah let out as he finished typing and turned his head to Clark. “Oh that, nothing really. I just have it for research purposes.”

Clark wanted to pry. This didn’t look or feel like a normal tank. “Right. Research purposes.” He repeated. He kept looking at the tank and it wasn’t until he heard Elijah's footsteps approaching that he turned back around.

“The X-ray is done.” He said. “We can go back through.”

Once back inside the lab, they found Blue where he had been left, completely still. Elijah quickly approached the table and opened a small hatch on the side of it. He pulled out a metal drawer and sitting on top of it, was a sheet of film. He picked it up to examine and through it, Clark could see his eyes go wide. “Extraordinary...” He muttered as he set the film down and went back to his journal. Clark himself felt at a loss for what to do and as such went back to his chair and fell into it. He reached for Blue’s hand and took it, rubbing the skin of knuckles with the pad of his thumb.

“What's so extraordinary?” He asked, hoping for a bit more information this time.

“Oh, his pelvis. It’s just not what I was expecting.”

“And what were you expecting?”

Elijah didn’t answer, too focused on writing.

Clark let out a small sigh as he fell back into his seat. He debated asking another question, but assumed he’d get the same lacklustre response.

Not long after, Elijah set his pen down once more. Clark expected a few more procedures in which he would be nothing more than a passive viewer, but that was not the case. Elijah simply turned back around and nodded. “I think that’s all for now.”

For now. Clark thought to himself, fighting the urge to grimace. *Like I'm ever bringing Blue back here again, short of him being on death's door.*

“As I mentioned, pain management is going to be key during this time. I would recommend morphine, which I will happily supply you as well as syringes. In fact, I will give him a small dose now so you know how to administer it.”

Clark only nodded. He had never really dealt with needles, much less where to inject one on a mer, so he simply watched as Elijah went over to the other side of the room and pulled open the fridge once more. He took out a small vile from within and then reached for a needle. “Morphine will stay stable for thirty days at fridge temperature. As I mentioned, his gestation will take approximately two months should everything go smoothly, so if you find the morphine is helping and you need a refill, you’ll need to come back here to get more.” He pieced the film at the top of the vile and drew in the liquid.

“Of course.” Clark muttered. *Of course it requires coming back here.*

Elijah began to walk towards him. “Alright, here I come, i’ll just inject it into his--”

But Elijah didn’t finish the sentence as he tripped and fell towards Clark. He yelped and Clark turned himself, bringing his arms out to try and catch him.

As they collided, the man slipped out of his arms. Then, Clark felt the needle snap against the skin of his thigh.

Elijah landed on the floor by his feet and Clark stared down at the broken needle sticking out of his shorts as well as the fluid soaking in around it. Elijah shot up, his eyes wide with panic. “Oh no. Oh no no. Clark are you--” he scrambled up and reached for where the needle was and all at once his panic disappeared. “It… it didn’t go in?” He pulled the edge of Clark’s shorts up and stared at the patch of skin the needle had been over. “My word, I thought for sure…” Elijah's face was awash with confusion as he looked up at Clark.

Clark simply shrugged. “I think it got caught on my pants and snapped.”

Elijah's face remained stoic before it suddenly burst into a smile. “Thank goodness for that! I was so worried, that amount of morphine into your system. You would have been positively delirious!”

“Yeah, I can imagine.” Clark said as he took in the doctor’s appearance, his lab coat and shirt were dishevelled and his glasses were askew. “Are *you* okay, doc? That looked like a rough fall.”

Elijah waved his hand as he stood up. “Oh, it’s nothing. I may not look it, but I am a rather sturdy individual.” He brought his other arm up to flex the muscle there before he quickly winced. “*Ow* . Although I may have sprained something on this occasion…”

“You need some ice?” Clark said, already getting up from his chair.

“Oh, no no.” Elijah said, bringing his good hand up to pat Clark on the shoulder. “I'll get that once I've given Blue his morphine. I just need to prepare another syringe.”

With some reluctance, Clark sat back down and watched as Elijah, with a slight limp in his gait, walked back towards the fridge. He opened it once more and pulled out a fresh bottle of medicine from another shelf as well as another syringe. This time as he walked over he stared down at his feet and then stopped by Clark, holding the syringe aloft. “Now.” Elijah said, leaning over Blue. “You'll want to inject it into the front of the tail here--” he brought his hand to rest on the area. “Where the thigh on a human would be.”

He quickly turned the needle around and pierced the skin. Blue let out a quiet yelp at the sensation, but otherwise didn’t try to fight it. When the needle was empty Elijah walked over to the other side of the table and threw it into the sharps disposal container there. “I will give you enough so that you can administer three doses a day for at least a month. Each dosage is already measured at 10 mg’s, and you'll need to wait at least four hours between doses. Whilst you *can* give him more than three doses a day, you don’t ever want to exceed a total of 60 mg's. You will also run out sooner if you give him more, but you can always come back as and when you need to get a refill. Understood?”

“Yeah, that’s great, doc.” Clark looked at the man. “Is that all?”

Elijah thought for a moment. “Yes, I think that’s everything. I trust you have proper storage for the morphine? It’s quite a lot, and it’s use by date will decrease if not properly stored.”

“Uh.” Clark pressed his lips together. “Define proper storage?”

Elijah didn't even entertain him with an answer. "I have a portable cooling system you can take. Keep it powered and it will keep the morphine cool."

"Oh, okay. Thanks."

"Not a problem. Wait here whilst I collect the morphine." He took off his gloves then walked out of the room into the smaller lab and through another door at the back.

Now that they were alone, Clark turned to Blue, his face carefully blank. "So, how much of that did you pick up?"

Blue made a face, before lifting up his hands. 'S O M E. I T ' S H A R D H E A R I N G O U T OF W A T E R.'

"Okay..." Clark said, pursing his lips. "So, the main thing you need to be aware of is… that you… happen to be… with..." Clark winced. "With child."

Blue however only nodded slowly. 'I A M A W A R E.'

Clark raised a brow. "As in… You were *aware* because of what you heard, or because you knew before we came here?" Clark let out a huff. "Like, am I the *only* one here who was surprised by this?"

Blue shrugged, though the movement was somewhat sluggish. 'I K N E W I C O U L D G E T P R E G N A N T. D I D N ' T K N O W I W A S.'

Clark closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "And you didn't think to mention the fact that you *could* get pregnant to me? You didn't think that would be useful information to tell your partner? *Seriously* ?"

Blue looked as though he was about to sign some more, but his arms slowly lowered. He shook his head and laid down on the table and all at once, whatever ire Clark might have felt, dissipated. "B? You okay?"

Very sloppily, Blue signed. ‘T I R E D.’

Clark frowned as he watched the mer close his eyes. He heard Elijah walking back towards them and when he was through the door, Clark stood up, whirling on him. “He’s falling asleep, is that normal?”

Elijah stood holding the storage unit and simply nodded. “I imagine so. It's the middle of the day.”

Clark felt his cheeks warm up. “Right. Nocturnal.” He muttered, though he still felt a tingle of concern in his stomach. “So it's not the morphine?”

“Oh, the morphine will definitely be amplifying his exhaustion. But that will only last for a few days, once his body becomes used to the medication, he won’t get as drowsy after each dosage. If he still does though, come back here as we might need to tweak the dosage.”

“Okay.” Clark said, staring at Blue's closed eyes. He looked peaceful, at least. No longer writhing or screaming. “Then I think I'll get him home.”

“Of course.” Elijah said, readjusting the container in his arms. “If you would like to follow after me.” He began to walk towards the doorway they had entered from and Clark scooped Blue up and gently set him back in the tub. He then grabbed the edges of it and lifted it up before walking after Elijah.

Elijah went the same route he had on the way in and Clark followed dutifully after. Even stopping with the man whenever he set the container down to take a breather. On one such breather he looked at Clark, cocking his head. “I meant to say it on the way in, but you must be extraordinarily strong to be able to carry a fully grown mer without so much as breaking a sweat.” There was no hint of suspicion in his tone, but the implication of his words was enough to send a cold chill down Clark’s spine.

“I grew up on a ranch.” Clark said quickly. “I had to carry calves to and from the barn all the time. It’s not a big deal.”

“Hum.” Elijah said more to himself before reaching for the container and resuming on his way.

When they reached the fin, Elijah maneuvered the container to rest on his hip and used his free hand to press the release. The door opened, flooding the room with sunlight and Clark winced up at it. He hadn't noticed the lack of sun inside the ship until he was confronted with a wealth of it. He walked across the walkway and set Blue down inside before coming back for the container in Elijah's arms. “Thanks again for all this doc, I appreciate it.”

“Not at all. You can probably imagine today has been a dream come true for me. If you ever need anything else from me, please don't hesitate to call. I will happily supply anything you need to ensure the health of your mer and offspring.”

“Yeah, about that…” Clark said, raising a brow. “You don’t even seem a little surprised about a mer getting pregnant by a human.”

“Oh, I've seen much stranger things happen.” Elijah said. There was a playful quality to his voice and yet all it did was cause Clark’s hands to go clammy.

“Right, well…” Clark cleared his throat before turning back towards his boat. “I’m gonna head off. Take care, doc.”

“And you, Clark.” He said with a crisp nod. “If you need reminding about any of my instructions, feel free to call.”

Clark only nodded and walked back onto his boat. Once across, Elijah pressed the button to his side and slowly the walkway retracted. Clark walked over to the kitchen and set the container down on the floor beside the cabinets. He then took the extension cord hanging from the container and plugged it into the outlet in the wall. By the time he walked to the console, the hatchway on the fin was closed and Clark assumed Elijah was waiting for him to leave before submerging.

Sure enough, by the time Clark turned the boat around and was a few hundred yards away, the submarine slowly lowered back into the water before disappearing from view entirely.

The trip home was largely uneventful. With Blue asleep, Clark simply kept his eyes on the water and kept moving forward. Perhaps because the trip back didn't involve a whining mer, it felt shorter than the trip out.

Once home, he moored the boat, lifted Blue up and carried him out to his pool. Despite being sound asleep, Clark knew he'd be more comfortable out in his pool, so set him down within it before tugging the tarp back into place.

He then emptied the tub and brought it back inside to slide under his bed. As he contemplated writing something in his journal he noticed his phone still on the desk, the light on it blinking up at him.

He raised a brow as he picked it up. Three missed calls. He opened up the notifications. They were all from Walter.

After clicking on the number he brought the phone to his ear. It only rang twice before he heard Walter's voice on the other end. "Clark!"

"Hey, Walt." Clark said, sitting down at his desk. "Sorry for not answering, I left my phone at home and--"

"Ah, don't worry about it." Walter said, and Clark could practically hear the wave of the hand that would have gone with it. "Listen, the reason I was calling is because we've had a bit of a setback."

"A setback?"

"Yeah, turns out I won't be able to start the build in November."

"Oh." Clark said, only slightly disappointed. "How come?"

"You know the property next to the Kyle's?" Walter asked. At the question, Clark made a sound of agreement. "I was going to leave it unfinished until I got your project done as I didn't have a buyer lined up for it yet, but I just so happened to get a call this morning. Someone wants it and are putting up good money for me to get it done ASAP. I know you've already paid your deposit, but I still have a few of my crew here as well a bunch of materials so I figured--"

Clark found himself nodding despite Walter being unable to see. “Yeah, it makes sense for you to finish that before coming here.”

The sigh Walter let out could not be understated. “I knew you'd understand. Melissa thought I was being unreasonable but I told her this makes the most sense.”

“I agree. Plus I don't mind waiting. I've lived like this no problem so far, I don't mind waiting a bit longer.”

“Yeah, it should only be about four weeks, then I'll start moving my guys over to your island. Again, sorry to be jerking your chain like this.”

“Don't worry about it.” Clark said, leaning back in his chair. “If anything, I'm happy for you. I kind of thought that place was gonna lay barren for a while.”

Walter laughed. “You and I both.”

“Know anything about the buyer?” Clark asked.

“Only that they already live on the island. They said they wanted a nice, plush pad to move into as their home at the moment is on the small and plain side. You can bet Melissa is already looking at gold fixtures for them.” He said with a chuckle.

Clark frowned. “They already live on the island?” He asked.

Lucy’s voice rang in his ear . *‘...All of us on the island, combined, don’t have enough to buy one of the houses he’s planning.’*

“Yeah, I was a little surprised too. After all, one of the shopkeepers here laughed at me when I told her how much I hoped to sell the homes for. Said no one here had that kind of money, well apparently they do.”

“Did you get their name?” Clark said, leaning forward ever so slightly,

Walter went quiet for a moment and then let out a small breath. “I mean, I'm not *meant* to tell you. Client confidentiality and all that BS. But it will say his last name was Russo. I didn’t catch his first, though.”

“Russo.” Clark repeated. He didn’t know anyone with that last name, or more specifically, he didn't know if anyone he knew *had* that last name.

Yet, despite not knowing for sure, he felt his stomach wriggle upon hearing it.

“He sounded alright on the phone.” Walter said. “Not a weirdo, and believe me I can sense them from a mile away. His check also looked alright when I cashed it. I guess I'll see in a couple of days if it all goes through, though.”

“Right.” Clark said, a frown slowly working its way onto his face. “I better let you get on. Talk to you later, Walter.”

“Of course.” Walter said brightly. “Thanks again for this, Clark. Talk to you soon.”

Clark set the phone down and stared at it like it had offended him. Why did the name Russo give him chills? Maybe it wasn’t even the name that was doing it. Despite what he said, he had hoped for Porter’s sake that the other property would remain unsold for a little while longer at least. He couldn't imagine what Porter must be feeling upon hearing that he was going to be getting a new neighbour.

What if it's…?

Clark however didn't even entertain the idea, shaking it from his head. *No. It can’t be. Plain and simple.*

He got up from his desk and went outside. It was already late afternoon thanks to his trip to and from the lab, but it wasn't like there was a lot that needed doing.

He tended his plants and crops, checked in on Blue to make sure he was okay and then went to ensure that the generator on his boat had enough gasoline to keep going until he could go out to Cottonwood and get more fuel. Once all of that was taken care of it, it was late, so after eating a quick dinner he pulled off his shirt and pants and slipped on some loose joggers and went to bed. It had been a tiring day, after all.

And during the night, a boat came to shore.

Chapter End Notes

stares at the new tag Ah yes... All according to keikaku (°ʖ°)

You know, a normal person would have probably waited between posting updates. I however, am not normal. Once I finish a chapter i'm like 'well, now I gotta upload it.' This week I've been pretty productive with my writing (after all I wrote this chapter and the previous all this week XD) and it really has a lot to do with how exited I am for this portion of the story.

When I say to you I have been planning on doing this since the beginning, I am not lying. I literally have been dreaming about when I could finally reveal that Blue can get pregnant and now that this chapter is done I am so exited for the next few and I hope you all are too.

Also I know some people get put off by m-preg, but I hope the way I handle it in the story convinces those who might stop reading because of it to keep going.

But yes! Plot. So much happened, but what could it all mean? Tune in next time to find out ;)

And as always thank you all for your lovely comments. They really mean the world to me and are what keep me going. Take care! And I'll see you all next time!

Chapter 32

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

Go to the end notes if you would like more context for the tag 'implied/referenced incest

See the end of the chapter for more notes

October 13th 2016

The door creaked open.

Clark was only slightly aware of it. He was still in that hazy area of sleep; where you weren't quite awake but you also weren't completely unconscious.

The creak itself didn't cause much alarm initially. His mind immediately went to Blue when he heard it, thought about how the mer came and went during the night and how this was just another case of that very thing happening.

No, it was the sound of footsteps that caused him to shoot upright.

In the darkness, he couldn't make out much beyond what was right before his eyes, namely, the barrel of a gun. "Well ain't someone a light sleeper," a voice said.

Clark peered past the barrel at the person holding it, but that didn't exactly yield much. The man was wearing a suit, not unlike the sort he used to see heroes wearing in the Justice League. Though he could definitely say the colour of this one was unique; orange and black.

What also caught Clark was that the man's voice was altered to the point it didn't sound entirely human, fluctuating with an almost mechanical twang. Clark stared up at him, trying to look through the mask he wore and finding he couldn't. He swallowed thickly. Lead lining.

“I don’t want to hurt you. Believe me.” The man said, as he sat down on Clark’s armchair, keeping the gun pointed in his direction. “You are more useful to me alive and I just need you to be honest with me. If you're honest, I'll let you live. If you lie, you’ll die. Do I make myself clear?”

“Why are you here?" Clark asked, examining the man thoroughly. If he did have Kryptonite, Clark would have felt it by now. If he was keeping it stored on him somewhere, Clark would have noticed the container for it. As it stood, the only thing that was lead lined was the suit itself and that observation did something to settle his nerves at least.

“I’m here because it is my understanding that you’re part of the mer market. Am I correct in assuming that?” The man asked, tilting his head by a fraction.

“The mer *what ?”* Clark asked, his confusion evident. “I’ve never heard of it.”

“Oh, right.” The masked man said as he leant back in the chair, nodding. “You just sell mers to Hadal with no care or worry as to what happens to them once you’ve handed them over. You’re just the middle man, you’re not really a *part* of the market. Is that it?”

Clark felt anger rush through him. “If you think I would *ever* sell a mer to that man you have another thing coming.”

“Well, you clearly did.” The man said and with his free hand, pulled something out of his waistband. Clark braced for what it might be, but it was only a phone. “Because if you didn’t; explain this to me.”

The man held up the phone and with a few button presses Clark's voice filled the room.

“Stay in the tub. Don't move around too much. You’ll make things worse.”

Clark’s mouth fell open. “That--”

But he didn't finish as after a pause, the voice resumed. *"We're going to a doctor. A doctor who knows about blackfins. He's gonna take a look at you."*

"You don't understand." Clark said, shaking his head. "I didn't--"

"I'm not gonna let him hurt you, okay? He's just gonna give you a once over. Then we're gonna go home. Of course, I promise."

Once the recording stopped, the man lowered the phone onto his lap. Despite the mask, Clark could feel his eyes on him, scrutinizing his every movement and expression. Clark looked right back at him, his brows furrowed. "Look, whatever it is you think I did, I'm telling you I--"

The man didn't interrupt him verbally, and yet, the slight cock of his head was enough to cause Clark's mouth to snap shut. Once Clark grew silent, the man spoke. "Right. Of course. My mistake. You brought the mer back ' *home* '. If that was the case, would you care to tell me why you were so quiet on the way back? Not a single word said. Almost as if the mer you brought with you... got left there."

Clark shook his head. "I didn't leave him there, he was just, just--"

"Drugged?" The man ventured.

At the word, Clark's brows shot up. "No! Well…" He looked away. "Not… intentionally," he grimaced. "He needed some morphine, so…"

"Oh, of course. The 'blackfin' needed morphine." The man shook his head, letting out a wry laugh. "Keep him nice and *pliable* for anything you have planned, huh? That it?"

" *What* ?" Clark sputtered. "No, it's because, well, because he--" *What the Hell do I even say?*

"Please. You honestly expect me to believe you took a mer to Hadal and *didn't* have an ulterior motive?" The man laughed. "God, you really are something. At first I thought maybe you really were

just wrapped up in something you didn't understand but the blackfin cum, the kidnapping, going to Hadal. Yeah, all that shows me you really are a twisted mother fucker."

Clark's mouth fell open, and as the man's words slowly sunk into his head, so did the implication. He looked closer at the mask, at the lenses.

One was opaque.

"Slade?" He asked cautiously.

"Ding ding ding." The man said brightly. "We have a winner."

At first, all Clark felt was an overwhelming sense of confusion as he re-evaluated the situation he found himself in. "Why are you doing this?" Clark said, gesturing to the barrel. "What did I ever do to you?"

"You didn't do shit to me." Slade said, his voice even. "But you fucked with my kin, and for that? You have to pay."

"You're--" Clark's mouth fell open. "You're a blackfin?"

Slade was quiet for a moment, as though contemplating his next words. Perhaps it was the situation or perhaps it was Clark's ever present earnest expression, but he gave the barest of nods. "I am. And I know for a fact you are not."

"No, you're right." Clark said with a shallow nod. "I'm not a blackfin. But that's what I am trying to explain to you, I met a blackfin. Well, I rescued him. He was badly beaten up when I found him and one thing led to another and--"

"You fell in *love* ?" Slade said, his voice dripping with sickly sweat mockery.

Clark bristled. “We did *actually* . I know I can't sync with him, but we figured something out, and the fact is I love him more than you can understand and if you try to take him from me, I will kill you.”

Slade let out a long drawn out sigh and shook his head. “God, you merners are all the same...”

“You want me to prove it? I can take you to him, if you want. Show you he’s just fine here." Clark said as he stood up. Despite his sudden movement, Slade didn’t once look out of control, as though he was prepared for anything at any time. “Come on. He’s out back.”

“Alright.” Slade said, following him out onto the beach. “But you try anything, I'm shooting you in the knee.”

Clark took him behind the cabin and tried to ignore Slade's quiet tutts as he must have seen the state of the pool Blue was sleeping in. He wanted to say he was planning something far grander but at the present time, this was the best he could do, but he doubted that would actually stop Slade from pointing a gun at him. “There. My partner is right in there. The morphine he took-- *for his pain* -- has made him very tired, so--”

“Well yeah, no shit." Slade said, setting his free hand on his hip. “You gave him morphine.”

Clark raised a brow. “Yeah, morphine makes you a little tired.”

Slade shook his head, another wry laugh working his way out. “Yeah, to a human maybe. To a blackfin you may as well have given him heroin.”

All of a sudden, the wind was knocked out of Clark’s sails. “Wait, what?"

Slade was silent again. “You… didn't know that?”

“How the *fuck* would I know that?” Clark yelled. “Hadal told me the morphine would help with the pain! He said nothing about it being fucking heroin!”

Slade cleared his throat and despite the lack of face on show, Clark could almost feel the skepticism in his stare. “Blackfin’s process opioids differently than humans or even other mers. Morphine makes them fall asleep in high dosages, sure, but in smaller ones it just makes them… *pliable* . With prolonged use, they get addicted and dependent on the stuff. It’s why most of you fuckers get them on it early so they have to come back if they ever manage to get away.”

“What the fuck. *What the fuck* .” Clark said, bringing his hands to his head. “I didn’t-- but-- what about-- holy shit.” He brought his hands down, his eyes feeling dangerously warm. “I’m going to kill Hadal.”

“Hey, not before me buddy.” Slade said, waving his gun languidly. “Which i’ll need your help with, by the way, but we can do that after showing me your mer who is definitely not your drugged up sex slave or anything.”

Clark narrowed his eyes at the man and after looking at Blue, who was still peacefully asleep in the pool where he had left him, he reached down and pulled off the tarp. It was only the moon light coming down on them as Clark turned to Slade. “Like I said, he’s still asleep, but look at him and tell me that he’s my ‘drugged up sex slave’.”

But Slade wasn’t looking at him. Slowly, his arm lowered until his gun was hanging limply downward. He lifted his other hand up and brought it to the back of his helmet. There was a click, and then, that face that had been hidden was now on show, filled with so much disbelief and awe. “ *Bruce* ?” Slade whispered.

“You--” Clark frowned. “You know his name?”

Slade perhaps forgot Clark was even there as his eye was suddenly on him, before narrowing. “The Hell you mean *I* know his name. You told Selina the mer you had was called ‘ *Blue* ’.”

“That's what I call him!” Clark said indignantly. “We only learnt sign language recently and I wasn’t just gonna *not* call him anything.”

“Jesus Christ." Slade ground out as he holstered his gun and brought both hands to wipe back the damp pieces of hair from his face. “If you had just fucking said--” he shook his head. “Alright, I know for a fact Bruce would have snapped your neck if you *were* trying to keep him here against his will, so that checks out. Still doesn't explain why you were taking him to Hadal, or why you took Tim.”

“Who’s *Tim*?" Clark asked, his exasperation evident. “Look. I don’t know what you seem to think I've done, but I’m telling you, I haven't done it.”

“Then why were you on Cottonwood on the tenth?” Slade asked, his eye narrowing.

“The *tenth* ?” Clark asked, thinking for a moment. Slowly, that evening came back to him. “I went to dinner with Walter, he’s going to be building me a new home here so we met up over dinner to talk logistics. You can ask him, I was with him the whole time. We ate, then I came straight back home.”

"Then why did you go to the Kyle's the next day?" Slade said, lilting his head. "Blackmail? Ransom? The sick pleasure of spending time with the family who you'd ripped apart only the day before?"

Clark crossed his arms. “I went because Barbara, Lucy's niece, was there-- *Is* still there, I presume. Lucy asked me to check on her, and that’s what I doing. Not that I could do that. The minute I got near that place it was like it was irradiated and..." He looked away. "I think I know why.”

Slade went awfully still. “Why?”

“I don't know much about mers, I really don't, but I know what I heard.” Clark eyed him. “I think I synced with Jason.”

“That would mean…” Slade looked between him and the still sleeping Bruce. “Holy shit.”

“I told you I'm not a bad person." Clark held up his hands. "This is all just a big misunderstanding.”

Slade looked as though he was about to nod before he suddenly shook his head, his hand once more resting on the hilt of his gun. “No. You still haven’t told me why you took him to Hadal. You may not know about mers, but you must have known a fucking monster when you saw one.”

“I didn't have a choice!" Clark snapped back. “You think I didn't know Hadal was a creep? Bruce was in pain and I didn't know what was wrong. *Hadal* is a doctor. *Hadal* knows about blackfins. I took him there ‘cause I didn't know where else to go. Besides, it's not like he would have been able to take Bruce from me.”

“Oh, really?” Slade said, an eyebrow raised in mockery. “You think you're *so* big and strong that Hadal wouldn’t have offed you the minute your back was turned and taken Bruce? The fact that you are still walking only tells me that he didn’t get the chance to act.”

Clark opened his mouth to disagree, but all at once memories from yesterday came back to him.

He was back in that lab, with Elijah right there before him.

‘He took out a small vile from within… But Elijah didn’t finish the sentence as he tripped and fell towards Clark… Clark felt the needle snap against the skin of his thigh… Elijah, with a slight limp in his gait, walked back towards the fridge... He opened it once more and pulled out a fresh bottle of medicine from another shelf.’

“Holy shit, he tried to kill me…” Clark muttered.

“Yeah and somehow luck--”

“It wasn’t luck.” Clark said, shaking his head. “He just... couldn’t.”

Slade rolled his eye. “I've seen him kill people without so much as blinking, he didn’t suddenly grow a conscience with you. Trust me.”

“That’s not what I meant." Clark shook his head and then gestured to the gun by Slade’s hand. “Shoot me.”

“What was that now?” Slade asked. “Did you just say--”

“Yeah, shoot me, that’s the easiest--” Clark made a face. “Tell you what, why don't I just--”

With a burst of speed, Clark retrieved the gun from Slade, leaving the man mildly confused in the process. He looked down at his side, where his gun had once been, as well at Clark, where his gun now was. His eye blew wide. “Uh…”

“Look." Clark brought the gun up and pointed it towards his other palm. He shot it, and the sound of it rang out across the island. Then, Clark lifted his palm up and let go of the bullet. It fell to the floor with a slight clatter. “See? Even if Hadal wanted me dead, it wasn’t gonna happen. That's why I took Blue there, ‘cause if the worst came to the worst and he tried something, I was gonna throw him through a wall.”

“Holy mother of God, you’re Superman.” Slade whispered.

“Yes. Yes I am.” Clark said, holding the gun back out to Slade who took it, his movements slow, as though they were being done on autopilot. “I would have mentioned it sooner but you were threatening me and all.”

Slade didn't speak for a minute and Clark did his best to try and understand the expression on his face. It was blank, and yet, slowly, Clark could see his lip twitch until all of a sudden, is exploded into a wide frown. “You could have killed me!” He yelled before turning on his heel and beginning to pace backwards and forwards. “Holy shit, I feel like a fucking dumbass. I was waving a gun at the fucking ‘ *Man of Steel* ’, doing my whole ‘do as I say and you won’t die’ bit and you just let me! All the while you knew that if I fired you'd just throw the bullet back at my like ‘sike’!”

Clark felt his cheeks prickle. “Well, yeah.” At Slade's expression, he chanced a smile. “Consider this payback for messing with me.”

Slade stopped pacing and for the first time that evening, he turned to Clark, a smile working his way across his lips. “You got me there.”

Clark crossed his arms, an eyebrow raised as his smile only grew. “It's not fun being on the other side, is it?”

“No it is not." Slade said, shaking his head. “Though I was messing with you *intentionally* . You were doing it ‘cause you're clueless.”

“Hey, I'm not completely clueless.”

“Just mostly.” Slade conceded.

“Hey, I know some stuff--”

But Slade was no longer looking at him, his smile was gone and he was looking at the pool. Clark turned there too, and saw Blue blearily looking up at him. He turned his attention to Slade and though still half asleep, his half lidded eyes blew open as a chirp left his lips.

At the sound, Slade practically jolted. “Bruce!” He yelled before jumping into the pool without a moment's hesitation. He pulled the mer to him and to Clark’s surprise, Blue wrapped his arms around the man, nuzzling into his neck with fervent repetition. “Holt shit, we thought you were dead. Me and Selina--” at her name Blue pulled back, his eyes wide as tears began to form in them. “She ain’t dead, nor are the boys, they're alive, they're safe.” Slade said, his own eye filled with tears. “Holy shit, you’re alive!”

Clark watched, his lips drawn into a thin line as he wondered what to do with himself. He debated actually twiddling his thumbs but figured that would be too on the nose. He instead looked anywhere aside from where his pregnant partner was currently being petted by the man who only minutes earlier had threatened to kill him.

Eventually the hugs and petting stopped and Slade let go, only to sit on the edge of the pool and turn to Clark. “You. Sit here. We got to talk.”

“Okay." Clark did as he was told and went to the edge of the pool and sat down, dangling his feet

inside. The relief he felt when Blue pushed himself up and nuzzled against his face was immeasurable. He knew Slade was watching, which might have been why he pressed a gentle kiss on the mer's cheek. "You okay, B?"

The mer nodded and pulled back. 'I ' M F I N E. N O P A I N.'

Slade watched the movements with a tight frown. "God, is this really how you've been talking?"

"What's wrong with it exactly?" Clark asked, raising a brow.

"There is nothing *wrong* with it, it's just… didn't you say you synced with Jason?"

Blue's eyes blew wide as he turned to Clark. Despite the lack of words, Clark felt the accusation there. It was further confirmed when Slade whistled. "You didn't tell him you found his *kids*?"

"I didn't know," he said forcefully. His eyes darting between the two. "I only figured out they were blackfin's yesterday morning. I didn't even realise they were *your* kids, B. I just figured y'all were kin."

"So if you *did* figure it all out, why didn't you say anything?"

"Because we were… busy."

"Going to see Hadal." Slade said flatly.

" *Because* Blue was in pain." Clark ground out.

"Right, okay, Bruce was in *pain* . Did he have an upset tummy or--" but Slade's mouth snapped shut and when Clark turned his attention back to Blue, his eyes were on Slade, unrelenting in their intensity. "Holy shit, it happened..." Slade muttered as his eye blew wide. "But what about--" he lapsed into silence again, and Slade shook his head "Holy *fuck* ."

Clark looked between the two, his lips pressed together. “Would either of you care to elaborate on what is going on?”

Blue looked pointedly at Slade, and then jerked his head towards Clark. Even without the sync or signs, Clark understood the meaning of that gesture easily enough. “Bruce’s species develops a womb when the last female of the pod dies.” Slade said slowly.

“Right." Clark said with a nod. “‘Cause he's a blackfin.”

Slade turned to him then, his expression carefully blank. “He isn’t a blackfin.”

Clark frowned. “But… he…”

Slade shook his head. “Clark.” He said, gesturing to Blue. “Bruce is…” he stopped, his lips pressing together as though trying to find the right words. “Bruce... is an abyssal fin.”

“*What*?” Clark let out. His eyes trailed up and down Blue as though he suddenly changed from hearing those words alone. But nothing was fundamentally different about him, he had the same skin, same face, same body, and yet, Clark stared at him like he was a completely different person. “But how is that possible?”

Slade shook his head. “They’ve adapted. The prehistoric abyssal fins couldn't come up to the surface or they'd decompress and die, sure, but modern abyssal fins are different. Over the centuries they mated with other mers, ones from higher up in the ocean and in doing so, it gave their body the ability to morph depending on depth. Bruce doesn't look anything like this way down at the bottom of the ocean, he looks, well…” Slade grimaced. “Not as handsome, shall we say.”

“But Hadal said--”

Slade blew a raspberry. “Hadal is full of bullshit. Think Freud but instead of being obsessed over whether or not you want to fuck your own mother, he’s obsessed with mer’s. He gets a half dead fin or worse, an *alive* one, pokes and prods them till they rot or die and then goes on to find another.” He

shook his head. “Bruce is the son of the last broodmother abyssal fin, and as presumably none of his sisters survived the quake, he’s now the broodmother.” Slade brought his hand up and patted Clark on the shoulder. “So, congrats on that.”

“Okay, hold the fuck up.” Clark said, his hands shooting up. He used one to move Slade's hand before whirling on him. “ *Broodmother* ? The Hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Okay, that is a lot to get into and I think it's better to do it when--”

“No no, Slade.” Clark's eyes took on a fiery quality as he stared the man down. “ *Now.* ”

The man looked between Clark and Blue before sighing. “That’s how abyssal fins work. They don’t mate in the conventional sense. The broodmother births *all* of the fins in an abyssal fin pod. That’s what makes them abyssal fins. If a non broodmother abyssal fin has babies with any other fin, even another abyssal fin, the babies are blackfins.”

“Bruce had two kids before he met Selina. He had them with his sister, which--" Slade held up his hands as though ready for Clark's noise of aversion. “ *Isn’t* weird for abyssal fins, and once you understand how broodmother's work, you’ll get why. Anyway, they had two babies together and even though they were born in the trench, lived in the trench, Hell, could *morph* like an abyssal fin, they were always considered blackfins in the eyes of the other mers in the pod.”

“And… that’s bad?” Clark asked cautiously.

Slade shrugged a shoulder. “They’re seen as not pure, ergo, the other fins excluded them. Bruce started getting annoyed by that, seeing his kids get excluded by his own kin and being able to do nothing about it, so when they got old enough, he began bringing the boys up higher in the water to get them used to being away from the trench and on one of these visits to the surface, Bruce got caught by poachers.” Slade looked at Clark. “I was one of the poachers.”

Clark’s face fell. “What happened to--”

“His kids?” Slade nodded. “They swam back down, found their mama and stayed with her till it all died down. Bruce on the other hand was thrown on deck of our boat, thrashing and screaming, and

that was the thing... I *heard* him screaming, heard him plead with us to let him go, yelling that his children needed him."

Slade swallowed, his face growing pale as he seemed to delve deeper into the memory. "I didn't know much about being a mernan. My mama told me when I was a kid that somewhere in our blood we had mer and I just nodded along. Said sure mama and went about my day thinking she was full of shit. I never heard mers calling to me, not once. Not until I saw Bruce, till I heard him pleading. I realised he wasn't pleading to all of us, it was just me." Slade looked at Bruce, who had now taken to resting his head on his arms on the edge of the pool. "He knew I was a mernan, and in that moment I realised what I should have realised long before that day. I wasn't going to sit by and hunt down mers no more, not when I realised I was one of them. I took the harpoon I had in my hands and I stabbed my boss right here--" Slade turned to Clark, bringing his hand to rest right over his heart. "Right in his heart. He bled out in less than ten seconds. Then everyone started screaming, some jumped overboard, but I went through and killed all of them. Every. Last. one."

"After that, Bruce started bringing me treasure from down deep as a sort of thank you and one time when he did, he brought his kids up and I got to meet them. Terry bit me and Damian--" he turned to Clark and pulled down his eyepatch, revealing the badly scarred skin as well as cloudy eye beneath. "Damian is the reason I'm blind in this eye."

"Jesus." Clark let out.

"They're great, though. Little hellions, as I call them. Bruce tells me they get it from their mother, but…" he looked pointedly at Blue, who only huffed out a small laugh. "I think their daddy had something to do with it." Slade smiled. "After a while of knowing him, I started diving down with Bruce. He would show me some of the wrecks he'd explore for treasure, and being part blackfin, it means I can handle pressure better than other mernans. On one such dive, I was coming up to the surface and when I got there I saw there was another boat in the water next to mine."

"There was a woman standing there watching me and I tell you, I nearly yelled when we synced. It was like, 'holy shit, another one!' I hopped on her boat and after learning a bit about one another, Bruce came up to the surface and joined in." Slade smiled fondly. "Her name was Selina, she was interested in finding treasure, and so were we, so, on that day we formed our little group and a few months after that…" he looked away. "Our group got a little more, how shall we say… intimate."

Something about how Slade said the word caused Clark's brow to raise. " *Intimate* ?"

Slade made a face. “I was going to keep this from you for your own benefit, but you need to know, me, Bruce and Selina used to fuck. Like, *a lot* .”

Clark recoiled, letting out a groan. “Jesus, Slade!”

“ *What ?”* He said, holding up his hands. “I just wanted to tell you now before I start trying to come up with more inventive ways of describing our relationship.”

“What about his…” Clark grimaced. “ *Sister* .”

“Oh, Talia? She was well past Bruce at this point. She was in line to be the next broodmother, after all."

“So what, you guys were… what's the word…”

“Polyamorous.” Slade said with a knowing nod.

“Right...” Clark muttered. “Okay, so now that we’ve established what will be the source of my new night terrors, would you like to continue?”

“Got it.” Slade said with a bob of the head. “Anyway, so me Bruce and Selina used to fuck but one day, oh no, Selina got pregnant. Now, I was fairly certain I wasn't the dad, but turns out I was. So we had a daughter together, Rose. She lives with me in Sacramento, but the *second* time she got pregnant, *that* was all Bruce.”

“She had three this time around, which is normal for mer litters. First came Dick, and he was like a mini Bruce. The first time I saw him I was like, holy crap, Selina’s a human photocopier. Then came Jason and I'm telling you, he was *born* angry. Little guy has had a permanent frown since he was an infant.” Slade brought his hands together and took a breath. “And after them, came Timmy.”

“Tim was a half-fin; came out all wriggly, with a little tail and gills. Standard practice for anyone who knows they're having mer babies, or if they *think* they’re having them, is to birth them at home. Which is what we did. Mer litters are always born early and that means they're smaller than human babies, so they’re pretty easy to have at home --” Slade went quiet, and Bruce's head poked up as he

looked at him. “Okay, so it wasn't *easy* , but the point is, Selina just pushed them right on outta her like a champ. Compared to Rose she said it was nothing, 'cause Rose..." Slade grimaced as he looked off into the distance. "Rose was a little heifer of a baby, lemme tell you.”

Clark grimaced at Slade's choice of words, but remained quiet as he went on. “Anyway, after Timmy was born, and with Dami and Terry out in the water too, Bruce started spending more time out there with them all. Me and Selina kept going on with our lives whenever Bruce left for the ocean until one day, we sort of realised things weren't the same without him, so she said, fuck it, I'm moving to Metropolis.”

“I couldn’t exactly blame her for her decision. The Gotham trench was right by Metropolis, so it meant she could see Tim more often and in her mind that’s all that mattered.” He looked down at the water. “She packed up, told me and Rose she was taking Dick and Jay there with her and that we could come too if we wanted. I said I was gonna stay, and as Rose was in her last year of high school she said she'd think about moving once she graduated. So with all that said and done, off she went.”

Slade took a breath. “Then about three months later, Metropolis was hit with a tsunami.”

Clark knew it was coming, could sense it in a way not unlike one might feel rain in the air. Yet, despite that, he still felt his chest seize when he heard the words. “They were there?”

“Oh, they were more than just there. Selina never told me what happened that day, but she did tell me they nearly died." Slade said slowly, before taking another breath. “As for Tim, he had just left Bruce along the outskirts of the trench and was swimming back to Metropolis when the quake hit. When he got close to the city, he saw it flooded, saw people floating in the water. He panicked, went back towards the trench but he couldn’t actually go *into* it. Half fins are more limited in terms of the pressure. They can handle *way* more than a normal mer, sure, but Tim can't get to where the abyssal fins would have been, where he thought Bruce was. So he sort of swam above the trench for a while, waiting to see if any mers came out.” Slade clasped his hands together and looked down. “None did.”

“The walls of the trench had shifted in the quake. The energy that would have come from that would have blown apart any mer near by. Any mer that wasn’t, would have tried to swim away, but--”

“Decompression.” Clark said, more to himself.

Slade however, nodded with him. “Exactly. Abyssal fins *can* morph, but it's a slow process. Takes

hours. These mers didn't have hours, they panicked, swam up and up until--" He shuddered. "I hate even thinking about it."

"So where was Bruce?" Clark asked, looking to the mer in question, only to find his head back down, his eyes trained on the surface of the pool.

"That's just it." Slade said. "We all thought he must have died. After Tim saw no one coming out of the trench, he freaked out, began swimming like a mad man towards Sacramento. Luckily, Rose was home at the time 'cause Tim was screaming bloody murder when he crawled onto our beach. He told her what happened and she called me. I was out diving on the other side of the city and hadn't heard anything about a tsunami warning, but sure enough, when I turned on the radio, it said Metropolis was hit badly. I raced back home, Tim told me what he knew, so we lay in wait to hear what had happened to Selina and the boys."

"The next day we got the call. They'd been evacuated to a nearby city and as their home was now gone, they moved back to Sacramento with me and Rose." Slade bobbed his head. "And that's where we waited for Bruce. We figured he would come to Sacramento if he were alive, so we just waited." Something in Slade's expression shifted, and a tight frown worked its way onto his lips. "Then a week went by and we figured, hey, maybe he got injured and is just waiting till he's in a better state before coming home. Then a month went by, then two months and before long we just figured he had been down there when the quake hit. We figured he was dead."

"But you weren't, were you Bruce?" Slade said, his voice bitter. "Couldn't have stopped by once in four years?"

At that, Blue's head snapped up and the glare he sent Slade's way spoke volumes. "Oh, bullshit. ' *I didn't want to find out they were all dead* ,' so you let us think *you* were instead? You know the worst part about it all, Timmy would go out *looking* for you--" Blue looked away, curling his head back into his arms, as though trying to block out his voice. "We told him not to, we said he might get hurt, but you know what he said, he said dad would do it for me…" Slade took a breath, standing up in the water and approaching Blue, a finger pointed right at him. "But you wouldn't, would you? You would rather be here, fucking *Superman* than trying to find your kids!"

Clark thought he was ready for what was about to happen, but as it turns out, he was not. The growl Blue let out was not unlike the kind he had made when those mers came to his island so many months ago. He lunged for Slade and they both fell into the water with a loud splash. Clark was immediately drenched by the water and he wondered what he was meant to do in this situation. It took Slade's hand, poking out the water, waving frantically to answer that. He rushed forward and plucked Blue off of him.

His gills were flared, and his eyes were dilated as he continued to swipe towards where Slade lay but Clark still kept hold of him.

Slade thrust his head out of the water, swallowing down mouthfuls of air as he did. “Jesus, Kent. Were you just gonna let me *drown* ?”

“What? Mernans can't breathe underwater?” He asked.

“You're really trying to make jokes now? Bruce just tried to *kill* me.”

“Well, you shouldn't have pissed him off.” Clark said, using his free hand to rub circles into Blue’s back. That did the trick as the mer stopped growling, now choosing to rub his head into Clark’s neck.

“Oh, sure.” Slade said, rolling his eyes. “Give him all the love cause he *agrees* with you. Face it, the reason you're mad is because you know i'm right. You don't like that after Selina and the boys hug and kiss you and tell you how much they missed you, that they’re gonna start asking the same questions I am. Face it, you’re scared.”

Clark could feel Blue stiffen in his arms. “Hey, knock it off." Clark said to Slade. “He’s upset, and you're making it worse.”

“Of course, your majesty.” Slade muttered as he stood up. “That's why Selina moved, you know. Why Tim got taken. He was doing fine on his swims when he was in Sacramento. Knew how to avoid the poachers there no problem. But Cottonwood? That small, unassuming little island? He let his guard down and for that, he was taken. Only reason they were even there was because I got word that a blackfin was spotted nearby. Minute Selina heard that, it was like she was possessed.”

Blue was curled against his neck and Clark found all he could do was continue to stroke his back. “Okay, well he must have had a good reason for not looking for them.” Clark said.

Slade made a face. “I know for a fact he didn’t.”

He heard Blue growl against his neck, and despite it all, Clark pulled back looking down at the mer. “...did you try to look for them?” Blue's eyes blew wide as he began to chirp, looking between Slade and Clark. At the display, Slade only shook his head.

“He was being selfish. Wanted to believe we were all fine out there somewhere because he was scared of the alternative.”

Blue lunged again, growls pouring from his lips. The only thing that kept him in place was Clark’s unwavering grip.

Clark didn’t know what Blue said, but Slade looked away, his lips curled inward. “I get it, okay. You find your whole city destroyed, your mama, Alfred--” Slade didn’t continue. “I *understand* how that can hurt a person, but you don’t just abandon everyone you love when you lose someone."

Even though the words were meant for the mer in his arms, Clark’s found his arms growing tighter around Blue as he shook his head for him. “You don't get to talk to him about that." He said slowly.

“Excuse me?” Slade said, setting his hand on his hips.

“I know what it's like. To lose someone close to you. I ran and hid too. It was…” he looked away. “It was too painful to feel love. To have someone care for me after knowing that the only person I ever wanted it from was gone. I lost my wife and son in the quake and it damn near killed me." Clark shook his head. "I can't imagine what it would have been like to lose even more. To see my Ma and Pa laying dead right along with them.” Clark looked up at Slade, willing the tears away. “I know to you he's selfish, but to me? He's anything but.”

Slade didn't respond. He simply took a deep breath and went to the edge of the pool, he climbed out and once there he looked down at Clark. “That might be why he’s stuck to you like glue, then. Birds of a feather and all that shit." Slade muttered, looking out towards the shore. “I’m gonna get changed. I'll be in my boat. When you two are ready, I wanna take you to Cottonwood. Selina will wanna know what's going on and I think the boys have the right to see their dad.”

Clark looked down at the near catatonic mer in his arms. “Can we go tomorrow? I think Blue--”

“We’re going *tonight* .” Slade ground out, not even looking behind him as he walked away. “It's been *four* years. He’s ready.”

Despite knowing Slade wouldn't see it, or perhaps because of it, he made a face at his slowly retreating form accompanied by a hand gesture involving a single finger pointed upwards. Once he was out of view, Clark sat down in the pool, leaning back to try and peek at Blue’s face. When he managed to catch a glimpse of it, he saw his face devoid of any emotion. “Hey, B…” Clark muttered, leaning forward to kiss his forehead. “It’s okay...”

The mer didn’t say anything and Clark remained quiet as he continued to rub circles into his back. After a few minutes of silence, Blue sat upright, turning slightly towards Clark as he brought his hands up. ‘D O Y O U T H I N K I ’ M A B A D P E R S O N?’

Clark’s eyes blew wide as he shook his head. “God, no.” He came in close, letting his lips rest on Blue’s forehead. “I get it. I really do.”

Blue lowered his hands at that, nodding slowly before looking towards the shore line. It was barely visible with the cabin and trees blocking most of it, but Blue still looked there all the same, perhaps because he knew what was waiting for them there. “You okay to go?” Clark asked.

There was a pause before Blue gave a nod so small it could barely be said to be one. Clark lifted him up and gave him another kiss. “I’m gonna be right there with you, okay? If you want to leave, just say and I’ll fly us outta there no questions asked.”

This time when Clark chanced a look at Blue’s face, he saw a smile there and before he had a chance to ask what caused it, Blue came forward, pressing his lips against Clark’s cheek. He smiled and at a leisurely pace, walked towards the dock where Slade’s boat was already waiting.

Chapter End Notes

Tag warning - *In reference to the tag 'implied incest' there is a sentence in this chapter in which it's revealed Blue has had sex with a relative.*

There he is! The boy! (and by that I mean crotchety old man)

So yeah, Slade isn't a bad guy. I mean, he still kills but at least he doesn't hunt mers :D Also, I know some of you were theorising about which 'five' kids Bruce was possibly referring to earlier on in the fic, but to me Terry never gets enough love :< hence his inclusion ;)

I answered some questions in this chapter, but there also some new ones to think about. I only hope you enjoy the ride I have you all on, and as always, let me know your thoughts and theories, especially as we get closer and closer to one of the main ones of this story being answered (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Take care everyone! See you all next time :D

Chapter 33

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Of course Slade's boat was huge.

He never really thought about his own boat that often. There wasn't much need to, after all. It had served him well over the years, ferrying him, and sometimes Blue, to wherever they needed to go. It looked nice, was reliable. What else was there to consider when it came to a boat? Apparently size if the way Clark stared at the monolith invading his beach was anything to go by.

Clark also didn't miss the smug look on Slade's face as he approached the gangway carrying Blue; he could tell he'd made the same observation he had, and worse, chose to follow that logic to it's childish conclusion.

Despite that, he couldn't help the appreciative hum he gave as he looked around after following Slade inside. The interior was sleek, modern even. With metal and black furniture spread around the space. In the middle of the room was a shallow pool with sofas curving around the outside edge. Slade gestured to it and without a word Clark went and set Blue inside of it. The mer was quiet as he sat in the water. As Clark watched him, he saw Slade turn his attention to the mer, his eyebrow raised as silent words passed between them. Blue only looked away at them, to which Slade only tutted. He turned from them both and walked to the front of the boat without another word.

Once alone, Clark sat on the sofa, using his foot to gentle prod Blue from his stupor. The mer made a sound at the touch, even offering a small smile to Clark, but it wasn't the kind that spoke of happiness, more begrudging compliance.

"You gonna be alright, B?" Clark asked when he heard the boat engine come to life.

Blue took a moment to respond, his lip wedged between his teeth. He turned to Clark then and raised his hands. 'C A N Y O U L E A V E M E A L O N E ?'

The moment Clark registered the words, he felt his stomach drop. He wanted to stay, but the moment that thought entered his mind, his own desire to be alone whenever he was overwhelmed came back

to him and he realised he really wasn't one to talk here. He instead nodded and got up off the sofa, crouching down to kiss Blue on top of his head. "I'll be just through there--" he gestured to the doorway he saw Slade leave out of. "You need me, you holler, okay?"

This time when Blue smiled, there was genuineness to it that caused Clark to blush. He got up then and left the room. Once out, he found himself in a kitchen dining area. He walked through the doorway on the other side, and this time, found Slade sitting by the wheel, his eyes trained straight ahead. "Hey." Clark offered, for lack of anything else to say.

"He kick you out?" Slade asked as he turned around to face him. He had that same smirk on his face from earlier and Clark found himself grimacing at it once more.

"He wanted to be alone for a little bit." He said, crossing his arms as he leant against the wall. "I can understand that."

"Sure you can." Slade said with a slow nod, after pressing a few buttons on the console he turned his chair to face Clark fully, the boat still moving forward. A part of Clark wishes his attention was still split between the two as having it all suddenly on him made his throat twitch. "Which reminds me…" Slade said slowly. "You've also been AWOL for the last four years, haven't you?"

Clark swallowed thickly. "Yes."

After offering that single word, Clark knew the needling was coming. Most people wouldn't be satisfied with a single word and he knew Slade was no exception. What was worse was that Clark was well aware that Slade was the type of man who was *very* capable of getting words out of people who didn't want to give them.

Yet despite this, he only shrugged at Clark's response, as though accepting it. "I get that."

Clark could feel the unspoken trap before him, primed and ready. His mouth opened, an eyebrow raised. "You do?"

"Well, sure." Slade said, tenting his hands before him. "Whole city crumbles on your watch, I can imagine you'd wanna get away from the world for a while."

There it was. Like a bear trap striking an unsuspecting hiker, Clark suddenly felt incapacitated. He struggled to keep his breathing even as he let out a quiet, “uh huh.”

Either completely aware or completely ignorant of Clark’s plight, Slade carried on. “There were rumours after the quake. Some of the survivors saw you fly off.” He tilted his head. “You didn’t go back.”

The teeth of the trap dug in deeper. “No.” Clark swallowed. “I didn’t.”

Then, Slade's eye slid onto him and perhaps it was the perceived pain of what was occurring, or the intensity in Slade stare alone, but Clark found his mouth open, already waiting to answer the question he knew was coming. “Why?”

“After my wife died. I just…” he took a breath, closing his eyes. “Stopped caring.”

Silence descended in the room. Even the quiet hum of the engine and the water splashing against the hull sounded so distant. When Clark managed to crack his eyes open, he saw Slade’s still on him. “You know, Selina and the boys were in Metropolis that day.”

“Yeah.” Clark swallowed. “You mentioned.”

“They probably saw you fly off.”

“I got that.”

“They’ll want to know why you did it.”

“Well,” Clark stood up from the wall, his hands clenched tight. “They don’t *need* to know, do they? I gave everything I could to the people of Metropolis, but that quake took something from me I will *never* get back and it made me realise I don't owe people shit.”

Something in Slade's expression shifted, and whilst Clark was expecting confrontation, he wasn't ready for the look of quiet pity. "Now that, I can definitely understand."

"Good." Clark forced out, looking away. "So you can stop talking to me about it."

They lapsed into silence once more, and eventually Clark found himself growing tired. He hadn't slept much before Slade had woken him, and by his estimations it was still very early morning. He wondered what Selina would think about being awoken at such an hour, then again, he assumed that seeing Blue would have her quickly forgetting the hour in which it was occurring. Which reminded Clark. "You never told me what happened to his other son."

"That's because I don't know what happened to him." Slade said, turning back towards the console to input a few more commands before facing Clark. "All I know is he went missing near Cottonwood on the tenth." At Clark's quiet stare he went on. "And I'm not gonna lie, I'm kinda annoyed it wasn't you who took him. It would have made things *a lot* easier. Now I'm back at square one, trying to figure out where he could be."

Clark pressed his lips together. "You think it might not be Hadal?"

"Well, it is a possibility. He's not the only person out there interested in blackfins, after all. Hell, half of the mer market is driven by breeding and poaching rare mers, like blackfins. He just has a *special* interest in them." Slade grimaced. "Which is why it's worth us interrogating him. Even if he doesn't have Tim, he probably knows who might."

Clark found himself swallowing at the words. "You mentioned this 'mer market' before… What exactly is it?"

"Oh right, you know nothing. I keep forgetting that." Slade said and despite his choice of wording, it didn't rub Clark as badly as he thought it would. Perhaps it was because of Slade's conversational tone, as if it wasn't a bad thing Clark didn't know anything and was more of an impasse they needed to overcome. "The mer market. It's how the rich and wealthy of the world show off how rich and wealthy they are. Now any Joe Schmoe can find a common mer, but a rare breed?" Slade shook his head. "You need a whole lot of money to get one." After saying the words, Slade leant back in his chair, raising his eyebrows. "Unless, you happen to just… find one on your beach one day."

Clark looked away. His cheeks tinged pink, he cleared his throat. "Right…"

Slade let out a huff of laughter. “You understand that part of why I thought you were part of the market was because you had a blackfin.”

“How did you figure that out, though?" Clark asked. "I thought I was pretty careful."

“You had blackfin cum... On your pants.” Slade said, his eye wide. “Or did you forget that little titbit?”

Clark’s mouth fell open as his face flushed. “ *Oh* .”

“Yeah, at first I thought maybe your ‘ink’ story could be true, after all, you didn’t give off the vibe of a mer poacher. You just gave off the vibe of an idiot. Hence why I wanted to get a swab of the stain, just to confirm one way or the other." Slade looked away in thought. “Once I had the swab, I sent it to my contact to analyse and he confirmed what it was. So yeah, that was the main reason I gave you the whole ‘Deathstroke’ routine tonight; I figured you were part of the market.”

Clark closed his eyes as he tried to unpack everything that was just thrown his way. First and foremost, he pressed his lips together as the memory of that day came back to him. “When you came onto me on the boat…”

“Swabbing the stain and planting my bugs.” Slade nodded.

“Yeah, okay, that makes sense.” Clark pursed his lips. “And when you said… The whole ‘ *Deathstroke* ’ routine? What does that mean?”

Slade’s eye blew wide. “Oh, well, *part* of what I do is rescue the mers that are bought on the market, but the other part involves killing the idiots who are dumb enough to buy them in the first place.”

“Wow.” Clark said, raising his eyebrows. “You, uh, kill a lot of people?”

“Depends on what you classify as ‘a lot’.” Slade said, shrugging.

“More than one?” Clark ventured.

Slade actually laughed at that. “Then yeah, definitely ‘ *a lot* .’”

“God." Clark said, a shiver running down his spine, but something Slade said struck him and he raised a brow. “But I thought… I mean, maybe I’m wrong, but I heard that mers just killed themselves in captivity? How do you manage to rescue them before they do?”

Slade let out a sigh as he eyed Clark. “You have to ask yourself, why would the wealthy of the world want to spend their money on a mer only for it to off itself after a few days in a tank? The answer, they wouldn’t, so those in the market had to figure out a way to prevent that from happening. Obviously drugging is a favourite. You keep a mer doped up, they won't know which way is up long enough to try and kill themselves, but then someone out there came up with something a little more *eloquent* . They're called ‘iron gills’. They go around the mers neck and it works by forcing water in so they can’t just suffocate themselves.” Slade crossed his arms and leant back. “You combine that with other measures that keep mers from hurting themselves? You have a thriving mer market. Now any millionaire out there who desires it can get their very own perfect, docile, exotic pet."

Clark let out a breath he didn't even know he had been holding. “That sounds...”

“Horrifying?” Slade nodded. “Yeah, the gills are not great. Also they’re a pain in the ass to remove. I suppose the one saving grace is that only those in the mer market have access to them. Zoos and researchers don’t even know they’re a thing, hence why you’ve never seen a live mer in an aquarium.”

“I just…” Clark brought his hand to his head and wiped back his hair. “I can’t believe I didn’t know about any of this.” Clark said, looking down at himself. “The mer market… How did I *never* hear about it? Not once?”

“I mean, I would say you’d have no reason to, but you were *Superman* . I figured you'd have at least known Luthor was part of it given how much you used to be in each others shit.”

At that, Clark could have sworn he felt his heart stop as a cold sweat came over him. “Luthor was part of it?” He muttered.

Slade let out a sigh. “I told you. The wealthy of the world are *exclusively* the ones the market was tailored for. Luthor may or may not have any mers, but he *definitely* gets invited to the auctions that sell them. Whether or not he goes, I don't know.”

“Why not?”

Slade let out a huff of laughter. “You can probably guess. It might have something to do with the man known as ‘Deathstroke’ who comes for anyone who buys a fin on the market and is dumb enough to get caught.” He looked away. “People are very eager to make sure me and my sources don’t get any info on where the auction houses and their clients are and so far, I'll admit, they’ve done a very good job of hiding themselves.”

“So that’s what they do? Every once in a while they host a big auction and sell off every rare mer they’ve found?”

“Bingo.” Slade nodded.

“So what if Hadal doesn’t have Tim?” Clark asked. “What if he’s been taken to one of these auction houses? What do we do then?”

“It is a possibility.” Slade agreed. “I suppose the reason I’m so set on Hadal is because he knows a lot of the poachers in this area, and given he makes his obsession *very* well known, I'd assume they’d give him first dibs on any blackfin that they managed to catch. Tim might only be a half fin, but Hadal will still have brought him if given the opportunity. Hell, even if he doesn't have Tim, Hadal is still the key to all of this. I only need to find him. If I find him, I can figure out which poachers he’s got under his influence, I can then figure out which auction houses he communicates with and then we’d be able to take out the whole market. Just like that.”

“I think I now understand why Hadal was so secretive about his lab.” Clark said, more to himself. “If you're after him, I can imagine he is doing everything in his power to prevent you from finding him.”

“Him and I have done this dance for years.” Slade practically growled. “I nearly had him once. Years ago. Managed to corner him in one of his labs, but he managed to distract me and he escaped. Now, he’s much more careful, and the worst part is he *knows* how badly I want him. He taunts me. Comes to Sacramento from time to time, and I know the only reason he does it is so that I can hear about it a week later and realise he was right under my nose and I missed him.”

Clark nodded slowly. “We could go to him.”

Slade looked at him then, a strange mix of appreciation and apprehension. “That was the plan when I thought you were one of his poachers. I figured I'd force you to call him up and say that you’d found another mer, then kill you and take your place. Now that I know that's not the case though, it makes things more tricky.”

“Not really.” Clark said, crossing his arms. "I've gone there once, I can just go there again."

Slade leant back in his chair, heaving a sigh. “You have to understand, you were *lucky* . I get you’re Superman, but Hadal is not to be trifled with. He is ruthless.”

“He’s also human.” Clark uttered, raising a brow. “Unless, you reckon he’s not.”

Slade shook his head at that. “Human or mernan, either way, he is formidable. You’re not invincible just because you’re an alien.”

“I understand that." Clark nodded. “But Hadal can’t do much to me, and I know for a fact that he'd want me to bring Blue to see him again if I offered. It would give us the perfect opportunity to get the jump on him and see what he knows about Tim and the market.”

Slade remained quiet for a moment, as though contemplating Clark’s words. He eventually looked up. “We’ll talk to Selina about it. I don't want to make any decisions without her input.”

“You think she’d say no?”

“No, I reckon she’ll agree with you. Bruce already does, but I think we need a better plan than you two going into that snake pit whilst I wait in the wings for my que.”

“If he does anything Slade, I'll laser his legs off.” Clark said earnestly.

Slade however only shook his head as he turned his attention back to the wheel. “We’re nearly there.” He said instead, gesturing to the doorway behind him. “Get Bruce ready.”

Clark did as he was told and walked back through. He found Blue as he had left him, reclining in the pool, deep in thought. His ears pricked up when Clark walked in, and he sat up fully with a chirp as he approached. “Hey, B.” Clark said as he crouched down. “You ready?”

The mer didn’t nod, but he also didn’t shake his head. Instead he gave a squirrely shrug that Clark could relate to all too well.

When the boat came to a stop, Slade walked out of the cockpit and out of the door without so much as a word. Clark figured he was to follow with Blue, but a little confirmation would have been nice.

He also didn’t have to worry about any prying eyes seeing them as he brought Blue outside. One quick look around showed that they were in fact on the Kyle's property. They had a small dock off of their private beach, not too dissimilar from Clark’s own. He walked to the end of it and stopped once he hit sand. He then turned his attention to the house before him.

The lights were off, but as Clark heard the doorbell go, he saw one flick on along the upper floor. Then, slowly more lights turned on as Clark now heard someone move around inside. He remained rooted where he was as he heard the door open. He trained his ears towards Slade already by the door.

“Slade?” Came Selina’s voice, groggy with sleep. “What are you doing here, I thought--”

“Yeah, our little ‘plan’ didn't exactly turn out how I thought it would.” Slade said quietly. Perhaps thinking Clark wouldn’t hear him if he did. “Go wake up the boys.”

Clark could hear Selina's heart beat increase, could hear how the sleep in her voice had completely disappeared when she let out a rushed, "Okay."

She quickly left, running up the stairs two at a time. Slade left the porch and walked around to the back of the property, waving the Clark from where he stood.

Clark got the hint and walked towards him. As they got closer Blue curled into his shoulder and after being led by Slade to the porch, they stood by the doorway until they heard more voices and footsteps from within. After a minute, Slade turned to Clark and then Blue before speaking. "Alright. Let's do this." He then pushed open the door, and stepped through.

The first thing Clark noticed was how different it looked from the last time he had been here. There were no hanging wires or unfinished plaster. It looked incredible, and Clark found himself looking up and around the entrance hall as he walked through to where he heard voices emanating from.

When he got to the doorway, all at once the voices stopped. The moment he, Slade and Blue filled the threshold it was like he had stopped time itself given how quiet and still everyone had become. He took in the faces of everyone before him. First was Selina, whose face was not too unlike Slade's the first time his eye had caught sight of Blue in the pool. Next was Dick, who's confusion was trumped only by his overwhelming relief. Then of course, there was Jason, who despite every other emotion he must have been experiencing only frowned as Clark walked further into the room with Blue.

"Hi all." Clark said lamely as he looked around the room and felt a lot like a person giving a TED talk whilst completely unprepared for said TED talk. "So it has come to my attention that you thought I had taken your brother and son, and well, I haven't." He readjusted the mer in his arms before clearing his throat. "See, what did happen was that I found a mer on my beach a few months ago, and well, one thing led to another and now we're sort of…" he winced. "Together."

The expressions before him didn't change, and slowly Clark turned to Slade. "Is there anything else I should say?" He whispered.

"You don't need to, they're already talking." Slade said, gesturing between Blue and the family. Clark let out a quiet ' *oh* ' at the realisation and then, slowly, he stepped forward and set Blue down on the carpet before stepping back towards the doorway.

There was more silence, before eventually he saw Selina's expression break as she fell onto the ground. Her arms looping around Blue as she wept and at that sight, it was as though the last tendrils

keeping Jason and Dick upright snapped too. They also joined the pair on the floor. “Dad…” Dick whispered as he burrowed into Blue’s shoulder. “We thought… we thought…”

But he didn’t finish what they thought as they all lapsed into silence once more. After a few moments Clark turned and tried to leave, only to find Slade's hand on his arm. “Where do you think you’re going?” He whispered.

“I just…” Clark made a face as he took in the sight before him once more. “I just thought I'd give them some time alone...”

He felt Slade's let go of him. “Not without me you’re not.” He said, and at that, Slade walked from the room leaving Clark to follow after.

They returned to the porch, and once there Slade let out a sigh as he reached into his pocket. He pulled out a packet of cigarettes and took one out. He brought it to his lips and lit it. Clark stared at the smoke as it drifted up into the air. “You know smoking is bad for you.” He couldn't help but say.

“Really?” Slade said, his brows raised in mock surprise. “Here I thought they were just fancy sticks that made magic air.”

“I’m just saying.” Clark began as he leant against the wall by the door. “You should think about quitting.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Slade said with a wave of the hand. “And *you* should think about shaving.”

“What?” Clark let out, before staring at Slade incredulously. “Where did that come from?”

“It came from me knowing what you looked like back in your Metropolis days.” Slade said, taking a long drag from his cigarette before letting it out as his eye trailed up and down Clark. “You looked a Hell of a lot better without that bird's nest on your face, is all I’m saying.”

Despite being somewhat used to Slade messing with him, he still felt his face grow warm when he felt

Slade's eye still on him. “Well, I like the beard. Means people don’t recognize me, for one.”

“I guess.” Slade said with a shrug. “It's just Bruce has sensitive skin. I figured for his sake you might wanna trim unless you wanna give him friction burns.”

That caused Clark’s mouth to fall open as he looked at Slade, aghast. “What me and Blue do--”

“Yeah, yeah.” Slade said, with a roll of the eye. “You're a prude. Got it.”

“I am not a prude." Clark deadpanned. “I just don't feel we know each other well enough to talk about my sex life.”

“What do you mean?" Slade asked, holding his cigarette out and waving it for emphasis. “We’ve both had sex with Bruce, that means we know each other plenty. We’re… What is it called. Weiner brothers!” Slade nodded emphatically. “We’re closer than you seem to realise.”

At that, Clark looked away, fighting the urge to vomit. Given Slade's career it stood to reason he knew how to get into someone's head, but he really was doing an expert job of it currently and it took everything to not say something at that comment. Eventually he did, but it most likely wasn’t what Slade was expecting. “So you... Have had sex with him?” He asked.

Slade paused, eyeing Clark. “Well, yeah.”

“As in…” Clark moved his hands around, in gestures he hoped were vague enough to not come around as obscene, but also plicate enough that Slade caught his drift. “You *had* sex with him... or...”

“Oh.” Slade nodded. “We switched. It depended on our mood, really. Sometimes Selina got the strap on out.”

Clark grimaced. “Delightful.”

“Hey, you asked.” Slade said, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yeah, and the reason was because… well…” he took a deep breath. “How did your dick not fall off?”

“Pardon?” Slade said his eye wide as the ash fell off the end of the cigarette.

“Blue told me his genitals are acidic.” Clark said slowly. “I just figured if that were the case back then you’d be a eunuch, is all.”

“Oh, *that*.” Slade let out, his hand over his heart. “God, you had me worried there, I thought something *r eally* fucked up happened.” He shook his head as he took another drag of his cigarette. “I got Blackfin blood, remember. Means my skin is resistant to the enzyme in his slick.”

“Oh.” Clark said, nodding as he thought. “That's understandable."

Slade raised a brow. "Did it burn you?"

Clark looked away. "A little."

Slade's eye blew wide at that. “Jesus, and you’re *Superman* .” Slade said, making a face. “The fact it *burns* you is somewhat worrying. I guess it’s because Bruce is transitioning to a broodmother. If that's the case his slick’s only gonna get more acidic, you know.”

Clark’s face fell. “And that’s because?”

Slade made a face. “I really don't wanna be airing out Bruce's shit. He should do that himself.”

Clark wanted to agree, but hearing that Blue’s slick was only going to get more acidic was worrying enough to nearly cause Clark to object. In the end, he didn’t and he shook his head. “You’re right, I'll talk to him about it later.”

“Yeah, definitely later as we should probably head back in.” Slade made a face as he threw the cigarette down. “Happy reunion has ended and now they’re onto the *fun* part.”

“Shit.” Clark muttered as he rushed back inside.

In the foyer, that sickly feeling he had felt the last time was here came back to him, but it was nowhere near as intense as it had been before. When he poked his head into the living room, the family were no longer all on the floor, with Selina and the boys now on the sofas as Blue remained on the floor, looking so small in that moment. Clark’s brows pulled together as he entered. “Hey.”

At his voice, Blue turned to him and chirped. His face said it all; a look of quiet accusation. Clark winced at it. “Sorry for leaving, I figured you’d all want some alone time.” At that, some of the tension left Blue's shoulders, but not all of it.

“Yeah, we still want it.” Jason all but growled. “Get out.”

“*Jason*." Selina chidded. “He brought Bruce home. Stop being rude.”

“No." Jason snapped. “We have a lot of shit we need to talk about, and we don’t need you here looking all pathetic whilst we do.”

Clark raised a brow. “‘Pathetic’?”

“Yeah, it's how all you humans look when you’re in a room and can't join the sync, you look all lost and pathetic.” Jason shook his head, looking away. “How you got dad to *not* kill you when you look like that is beyond me...”

Clark couldn't help it, he crossed his arms an eyebrow raised in defiance. “So you think I'm human, huh?”

Jason eyed him warily. “Okay, so you might be a ‘mernan’, but you ain’t a blackfin. I know that much.”

“No, no.” Clark nodded. “You’re right. I'm not a mernan. It’s just, I'm not human either.”

That caused all of their expressions to falter. Even Jason grew curious as he sat up slightly. “...What do you mean by that?” Selina asked cautiously.

Was he really about to do this? He supposed it was necessary, but Slade’s earlier words came back to him as he contemplated his next words. *They’ll want to know why you did it.* “I’m an alien." He said at their expectant expressions.

He took in all their faces, as one by one they all became filled with disbelief. Jason's mouth fell open as two words fell from his lips. “An… Alien?”

“Yup.” Clark said, pressing his lips together. “And given you used to live in Metropolis, I’ll assume you don’t need me to explain what kind of alien.”

“You’re…” Dick let out breathlessly. “You’re *Superman* ?”

Clark steeled himself. “I am.”

The stunned silence that followed was to be expected, but what wasn't were the renewed tears that fell from Selina’s eyes and the way Jason's irate expression melted entirely. He supposed he could understand tears. Metropolis was traumatic for more than just himself, but to see Jason look *less* annoyed at the revelation was somewhat confusing.

Then, slowly, he watched as Jason brought his hand down to his pant leg. He rolled up the edge of it and revealed what was under it. It was a prosthetic limb, and Clark found himself taken aback at the sight of it. “I lost my leg four years ago.” Jason began, his voice sounding so small. It reminded Clark that the person before him, for all his bravado, was just a teenager. Clark found himself rooted in place as he continued. “We were In Metropolis when the earthquake hit. Walking along the street. One of the walls collapsed and a huge chunk of it landed right on my leg, pinning me to the ground.” Suddenly, his eyes flew up to Clark, assaulting him with their intensity. “We could see the wave coming, mom and Dick tried to move the rock, but it was no use. I was stuck. I thought I was gonna die. I thought we were all gonna die.”

“But then.” Jason muttered as he stood up. “Someone flew down from the sky, lifted the rock off my leg like it was nothing. He grabbed me, mom and Dick and flew us to a rooftop. We watched as the street we had been on was swallowed by water just a few minutes later.” Jason approached him slowly, his eyes watering. “I remember after the quake people called Superman a coward, said he betrayed the people of Metropolis when he flew away to God knows where, but me?” He shook his head. “I couldn’t. ‘Cause every morning, I wake up. Every morning, I see my family. I knew that if it wasn’t for Superman, I wouldn’t be here. None of us would be.”

Clark let out a breath he didn’t know he had been holding. “That was you...” He said quietly. At the words, snippets of that day came back to him. Despite how much he wanted to keep the memories at bay, he was unable to. He saw a boy, screaming for help, a mother and brother desperately clawing at a rock. He remembers the mothers eyes when he left them on that rooftop; a shade of green so vivid he knew he’d remember it.

And he did. “That’s where I knew you from.” Clark muttered as he looked at Selina. “When I first saw you here, I recognized you but I just couldn’t figure out where from.”

It had been Metropolis, four years ago. With the memory brought back to his mind, he marveled at how much Dick and Jason had grown since that day. How different they had looked back then. “You were so small." Clark said, more to himself. “The rock was nearly the size of you.”

“Yet you lifted it like it was nothing.” Jason let out, tears falling from his eyes. “You saved my life.”

Clark found himself at a loss. Of all the things he was expecting to happen here, this was not one of them. He thought Jason would yell more insults at him, maybe even throw something, but instead he found the teen closing the gap between them, and suddenly, Clark found his arms wrapping around Jason's form, feeling his shirt growing damp as he did.

Not even four seconds later, Jason pulled back, his face a mess. “You smell like ass.”

“Okay, Jason...” Clark muttered as he pushed the teen away by the shoulders. “Good talk.”

“Sorry.” Jason said, wiping his face. “I just thought you should know.” He turned his head by a fraction. “Especially as dad has apparently already told you.”

“I don't have a shower on my island, okay?” Clark said, heaving a sigh. “When I finally have a proper house I will shower regularly, and shave as apparently my beard is an eyesore.”

“I don't know about that.” Selina said softly and despite the tears, she tried for a smile. “I think it makes you look distinguished.”

“Slade said it looked like a bird's nest…” Clark muttered as he poked at it.

“He’s right.” Jason said with a nod.

“Jason!" Selina chided, her smile growing. “Don’t be rude.” Turning her attention to Clark, she batted her hand towards him. “Don’t listen to him, Clark. I for one think it's worthy of being sat on.”

At that Blue’s head snapped to Selina, a soft growl coming from his lips. Selina let out a faux gasp. “What was that Bruce? You *don’t* want me riding Clark’s face?”

Clark sputtered as Jason and Dick both groaned. “ *Mom* !”

“What?” Selina asked, her eyebrows raised in mock confusion. “You should be thankful you have such a liberal mother.”

“There is a liberal, and then there is gross...” Dick shuddered. “Also, we have more important shit to be talking about than… *that* .”

“God, yeah, are you guys all gonna be together now?" Jason said, looking between the three of them. “I don’t think I can handle having *three* dads.”

Clark’s eyes blew wide at the implication. “ *Uh* .” He let out, as his brain failed to come up with any other syllables.

In the end, he didn't need to as Blue apparently did it for him. He didn't know what was said, but he did see Selina's posture wilt ever so slightly despite how much she must have been trying to hide it. "Your father's right." She said softly. "It's been a long time since we were together. He's with Clark now."

Jason's expression shifted to a frown as he turned to Clark. "You asshole."

Clark sighed. "I'm gonna miss those three minutes were you liked me."

Jason turned from him then and made his way back over to the couch. Slade re-entered the room and despite the distance, all Clark could smell was cigarettes. "I miss anything?" He asked.

"Clark's a homewrecker." Jason said conversationally.

Selina gasped. " *Jason!* "

"What?" He crossed his arms. "He is."

Clark heaved another sigh as he made his way to one of the sofas and sat down. Blue came towards him then, moving carefully across the floor until he was by his feet. Clark brought his hand out and the mer took it readily, squeezing his fingers as Clark spoke. "Whilst I would *love* to listen to Jason berating me for hours, I really would prefer if we talked about why we're all here."

"Yeah, that's a point." Dick said as he turned to Slade. "If Clark doesn't have Tim, who does?"

"I still think it's Hadal, and even if it's not, he will know who has Tim, I'm sure of it." Slade looked to Selina then. "We have an idea on how to get to Hadal, but I wanted to run it by you first."

“What is it?” She asked, her eyes darting between the two of them.

Slade jerked his head towards him. “Clark has an in with Hadal. He went to his lab yesterday. We figured if he calls him again, gets his coordinates, we can go and interrogate him.”

“Okay, so do that.” She said brusquely.

Slade however signed. “Am I the only one who sees this going bad?”

“He’s Superman, Slade!” She said, gesturing to Clark emphatically. “He can shoot lasers from his eyes, use super strength to throw Hadal through a wall, or freeze him in place, and you think this can go *bad* ?”

“Hadal tried to *kill* him.” Slade said emphatically, eyeing her. “Point is, he failed, and he’s not an idiot. He’s probably wondering why his plan didn't work and he might come to the conclusion that Clark isn’t human.”

“How did he try to kill you?” Selina said, whipping her head towards Clark.

“He tried to inject something into me, but the needle broke.”

“ *Lovely* .” Slade muttered.

Selina however turned her attention back to Slade. “Okay, so because a needle broke, you really think his first thought would be that Clark is Superman?” Selina pressed her hand to her chest. “Slade the man saved our lives and I didn't recognize him because of a *beard* .”

“That’s different.” Slade ground out. “Hadal is going to *think* about it, he’s going to wonder why that needle broke, he most likely will try and prepare just in case his hunch is right. There is a reason the man has managed to keep himself off my radar for so long. He isn’t an idiot, Selina.”

“Considering how hard Kryptonite is to find, I really doubt he’s gonna be able to acquire it anytime soon.” Clark said, leaning forward. “You’re right, though. If he does suspect I'm Superman, there is more risk involved, which is why we need to act now before he has a chance to get any.”

“Exactly!” Selina said, throwing her hands out for emphasis. “Clark said it best, we act now before he has a chance to prepare.”

“That means bringing Bruce back to him.” Slade said, eyeing the man. “It means potentially letting him get close again to keep up the façade long enough for me to break in. Are you both ready for that?”

Blue sat up slightly, eyeing Slade. The man let out a breath as he looked away. “I get it. You wanna save Tim, but think rationally, this is risky; you’re putting yourself at *risk* .”

There was silence as presumably they all spoke. Clark tented his hands and waited for it to end, hoping he did not look in any way 'pathetic'. When they were done, Blue turned to him, rubbing his face against his knee. Slade let out a sigh. “He says he’s in.” He muttered as he shook his head. “We should get some sleep, then. You’ll call Hadal tomorrow, make up something that means you need to see him ASAP, and he should be more than willing to have you come back.”

“Okay.” Clark said, already getting up. “Should I head back to my island or…?”

Selina shook her head. “You can stay here. We have plenty of rooms, and Bruce can sleep in the tank.”

Clark looked down at the mer by his feet. “You okay with that, B?”

He nodded before making his way out of the room with Slade. “I’ll show you to the tank.” He said as the mer shimmied along the ground beside him.

Once they were gone, Selina stood up. “Now.” She said, as she clapped her hands together and eyed the two teens on the sofas. “You two, off to bed.”

“Right.” Dick said as he stood up and said his goodnights. Jason did the same, though made sure to exclude Clark from his ones. Once they were alone, Selina came in close to him, her hand resting on his bicep.

“I’ll show you to the guest room.” She said with a small smile.

Clark only looked down at her hand. “Uh. Sure.”

As they left the room and made their way towards the staircase, Clark felt his stomach rumble and either Selina had impeccable hearing or it was louder than he realised because she paused and turned to him, a small smile on her lips. “Hungry?”

Clark blushed, his hand going to his stomach. “No, I’ll be fine.”

“Oh, hush.” Selina said, turning around and making her way to where Clark knew the kitchen resided. “I’m sure we have something you can have as a little midnight snack.”

Clark wanted to say that wasn’t necessary, but then again, a midnight snack did sound like a great idea. He quickly followed after Selina and once in the kitchen, he saw her already opening up the cabinets within. “Do you want something sweet or salty? We have cereal for sweet and potato chips for salty.”

Clark however felt his attention drawn to what was on the large island in the middle of the kitchen. “Is that cake?” He asked, pointing at the glass dome.

“Huh?” Selina asked, turning her attention away from what Clark could see was an impressive amount of cereal boxes. “Oh that, yes it is.” At Clark’s wide eyes she went on. “You can have some if you like.”

Clark nodded fervently and then waited patiently as Selina came around and got a small plate out from another cabinet. She then lifted the dome off the cake and cut a slice from it. Clark was thankful

she wasn’t stingy with the portion, as the smell that reached Clark’s nose as it was passed over was divine. “Thank you.” He said, and not even a moment later he brought the slice to his lips and let out an appreciative hum. “Oh my God.”

“Good isn't it?” Selina said, leaning against the counter top. “Of course, I can't take credit. My neighbour made it.”

“ *Porter* ?” Clark blurted, a few chocolate crumbs flying out. “Damn, I'm gonna need to get him to bake me one. This is amazing.”

“Oh no, not Porter.” Selina said, waving her hand. “Our new neighbour. Well ‘soon to be neighbour.’ They're going to be moving in once Walter finishes the other development. She brought over this cake to say hello.”

Clark swallowed down the cake, as he looked at Selina. “So you met the buyer?”

“Oh, yeah.” She said, nodding. “Just one of them, though. I haven't met her husband yet.”

“You’re not worried?” Clark asked, taking another bite. “Porter is terrified of having new neighbours.”

“Because of his mer?” Selina asked, cocking her head slightly.

“Yeah, because of--” but Clark stopped talking, his mouth falling open as a few crumbs fell out of his mouth. “I mean--”

Selina batted her hand. “Clark, I literally have a mer child. I know Porter has a mer, you really don’t need to hide that from me.”

“Still…” Clark said, wincing. “I shouldn't have told you that.”

“Well, you did.” Selina shrugged. “Besides, I already knew, so it’s not a big deal.”

“How did you know?”

Selina rolled her eyes. “Please, the man went out fishing at *midnight* . I saw him whenever I went out with Tim, sitting in his little boat. He was *not* subtle.”

Clark only let out a sigh. “Okay. But you can understand why he’s nervous about having new neighbours, right?”

“Well, sure.” Selina said with a nod. “But Carla seemed nice, and whilst I haven't met her husband, I doubt they’re the type to sit by their windows with binoculars looking out for suspicious activities.”

Clark paused. *Where did he know that name?* “Carla?”

“Yeah, Carla Russo. I think she’s Italian. Or maybe her husband is.” Selina shrugged. “I don’t know. She did tell me her husband's name, but I forgot. I was already eating a slice of cake at that point, and honestly, she could have been confessing to murder and I would not have known.”

Clark however was also not paying attention to Selina as that name circled around his mind. “Carla...” He repeated to himself.

Where did he know that name from?

Why did it seem so familiar?

As he thought, memories slowly drifted back to the surface of his mind and like a film at the theatre, he let them play out, not sure of where they were going to go. He thought of an office. Of Porter’s resigned expression. A mer hanging from an arch. And rain. So much rain.

‘Carla’s not exactly going to run an investigation that might implicate her husband.’

‘It’s easy for you to say, you have Carla wrapped around your fucking finger.’

“Oh my God...” Clark muttered. “Antonio.”

“Yeah!” Selina said, brightly. “That’s his name! You met him?”

Clark’s eyes blew wide. “Selina, that man, that man is--”

In only a moment, Selina’s entire posture shifted. Her eyebrows furrowed together as she spoke. “What? What did he do?”

“He--” Clark managed to get out, before he stopped at the sound of footsteps.

Before he knew it, the acrid scent of cigarettes once again filled the room. He looked up and found Slade leaning against the doorframe, his arms crossed. “Bruce is sleeping in the tank. I would ask how things are going in here, but it looks like Clark’s about to faint.” He approached him then, his hand going to his back. It felt surprisingly reassuring. “You alright there, slugger?”

Selina turned to him, her face awash with concern. “He was talking about our new neighbours.”

“The Russo’s?” Slade asked. “What about them?”

“Antonio…” Clark finally managed to get out. “He’s…” he turned to them. “He is evil.”

Selina’s expression only grew more concerned, whilst Slade only cocked his head. “Explain.”

“He…” Clark pulled away from the island, from Slade's hand, and walked to and fro as he tried to get

his thoughts in order. “Well let's start off with the fact that he caught Blue and was going to kill him until I managed to stop him. Then, he killed the man whose land this used to be.” He gestures around him for emphasis. “Killed his mer too, and hung her from the marina for everyone to see. Then to top it all off, he came to *my* island, shot *me* in the head, and tried to kidnap Blue. If I hadn't been invulnerable, I would be dead, and Blue? He’d be with Hadal.”

He hoped that was enough and it apparently was as Selina shuddered violently. “Oh my God.” She said, her voice shaky. “Slade, what--”

But Slade wasn’t looking at her, his attention firmly on Clark. “You sure about all that?”

“Positive.” Clark said. “I still have the bullet hole in my floor from where he tried to shoot me.”

“Okay.” Slade muttered. “So he’s a poacher. Good to know.”

“ *Good to know* ?” Selina snapped. “He tried to take Bruce! We can’t have him living here!”

“So I'll kill him.” Slade shrugged. “Simple.”

“No, not ‘ *simple* ’.” Selina huffed as she curled her hands into fists. “I don't want that man anywhere near here when Tim comes home! What if he does something to him!”

Slade responded, but Clark was only partially aware of the conversation at this point. He was too focused on keeping his breathing even. Something about the idea of Antonio being Porter’s new neighbour, of him living right beside Blue’s family, made his stomach twitch, and despite how delicious the cake had been, he felt his stomach churn at the idea that it had been made in a kitchen that belonged to the man who had once tried to kill him.

But how was that even possible? If Antonio was so desperate for money and supplies that he resorted to stealing from the town; if he was willing to kill Clark for a quick payday, how would he ever have been able to afford Walter’s development? Where did he get the money?”

‘Do you know how much someone would pay for a mer like this?” Antonio said, using his foot to prod at the mers limp body. “A million. One million dollars for a single mer.’

Perhaps it was a sound he didn't even know he had made or his expression, but Slade and Selina quickly stopped their bickering as they turned to Clark, eyebrows furrowed. “What is it?”

Clark swallowed thickly. “I think I know who took Tim.” He said, his eyes wide. “And I don't think you're gonna like the answer.”

Slowly, realisation dawned on both their faces. Selina shook her head, tears springing from her eyes. Slade only grew more resolute. “What makes you so certain?”

“Think about it. Tim went missing and Antonio just so happens to buy a new expensive property here not even a week later?” Clark shook his head. “He lives here, works the waters around Cottonwood. Hell, he sells mers to Hadal all the time. If Tim was swimming around nearby, it stands to reason that he was the one who found him and it stands to even further reason that he’d have sold him to Hadal when he did.”

There was silence in the room as the three thought. Eventually Slade nodded. “Okay.” He said, taking a deep breath. “So I will definitely be killing him. But if anything, this is a good thing.” At Selina's aghast expression, he carried on. “Look at it this way, we now know for certain Hadal has Tim.”

Selina however didn’t look comforted by the words, if anything, she looked enraged. “You don’t get it, she was in my *home* , I have her stupid cake right here!” She said waving to the offending dessert. “That woman came here and sat in my home after her husband took my son from me!”

“We don’t know for certain if Carla knows what Antonio did.” Clark said softly. “She might be innocent in all this.”

“ *Please* what idiot would believe their husband comes into a lot of money suddenly without it being from something crooked?” Selina spat. “She must know.”

“We can’t confirm that right now.” Slade said, his hand going to Selina, pulling her towards him. Despite her anger, she came easily, resting her head on his shoulder. “Don’t let it get to you, Selina. Try and get some sleep and we’ll deal with this all tomorrow, alright?”

“Yeah, like I can sleep right now...” Selina muttered.

“Well, at least try.” Slade said as he pulled back. He then began to slowly usher her to the door before turning to Clark. “Come on now. You too.”

Clark followed after and soon they were back at the staircases, making their way upwards. Selina ducked into her room and from the doorway she turned to Clark as Slade continued to walk.

“Guest room is the fourth door on the right.” She said, to which Clark only nodded.

“Alright. Sleep well, Selina.

“I’ll try.” She said as she shut the door. Once alone he looked down the corridor to find Slade stopped by another doorway. He approached and when he did, the man turned to him, tilting his head up.

“You sleep well, too, Clark. We have a big day tomorrow.”

Clark nodded at the sentiment and stepped through into the guest room. Immediately, he was confronted with the scent of fresh laundry and what he had to assume was lavender. A quick scan around the place only had him growing more impressed and it wasn’t until he stood at the foot of the bed, staring at the plush bedding that he suddenly his exhaustion finally catch up with him. He fell against the mattress, groaning in delight at how nice it felt against his skin. He thought it might take him a minute to fall unconscious, but the soft linen had him gone in mere moments.

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens (°ʖ°)

Bruce and his babies are reunited! What about Hadal? When will Timmy be coming home? Stay tuned to find out (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Also after I dropped the name Russo a couple chapters back, I was wondering if anyone would make the connection that Tim went missing around Cottonwood and that we know one person on that island who might be the culprit. Looks like Antonio has some explaining to do, huh? (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

I also just wanted to add this here, just as an aside, that I know some of you guys love this story and when I say that it makes me so unbelievably happy that that is the case, I mean it, but reading comments like 'when is the next update' especially after I've mentioning I'm back at university and am very busy, is the ultimate demotivator. What keeps me going are your kind words and love, a 'when's the next update comment' just makes me feel like a failure for not getting an update out and sometimes causes me to not want to write at all.

I want to state I don't begrudge anyone who has left me a comment like that in the past as I know most of the time it comes from a place of eagerness and support, but as already mentioned, if you wanna motivate me tell me what you think is going to happen next, tell me what you enjoyed about the chapter, just please don't ask me when the next chapter is coming cause I won't be able to answer you.

Anyway, I'm sorry about the word vomit. I will finish off by saying I hope you all enjoyed this chapter and I will see you all next time! Take care! :D

Chapter 34

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 14th 2016

For one horrifying second, Clark didn't know where he was.

You wake up in one place for over four years only to change it up one time, it stands to reason that it might take a moment to assess things.

The first thing that hit him was the smell of the sheets. Clean, floral, the kind of smell that under normal circumstances wouldn't have done much on its own, but that was the thing, it wasn't on its own. As he laid there, his hand stretched out across the mattress, he could have sworn he felt something warm and hairy by his fingers. Why that feeling infused him with such a strange mix of sadness and hope, he couldn't say.

It's just Lois, his mind supplied, and that, *that* was the moment he realized he didn't know where he was.

He rocketed up, his eyes wide and frantic as he turned to his side.

The bed was empty aside from a cat cleaning itself on the pillow. It looked up at Clark indignantly, as though wondering why he was being interrupted during his oh so important task.

It took a few minutes but eventually Clark's heart slowed back down to acceptable levels. He was still shaken though, so rested his head against the pillow once more, staring at the cat to give his mind a much needed reprieve. Yet despite how great a job the cat was doing at cleaning itself, it still didn't prevent Clark's mind from repeating that second over and over.

It was uncanny how real it had felt. How sure he had been of where he was, *who* was beside him. That hazy feeling one gets when slowly drifting awake often played tricks on his mind, but this was on a whole other level. He had been so sure of it. There was a small part of him that honestly believed he

would have seen the back of Lois' head upon opening his eyes; to wake and find his hand threaded through her hair.

That didn't happen though, and perhaps that was truly the worst part about that second, it was the crushing knowledge that came right along with it. That knowledge that no matter what, he would never wake up beside her again.

"Jesus Christ…" He muttered as he rubbed his face. He hadn't felt this bad waking up in a while. Hadn't had to deal with these types of thoughts for a while, either. It didn't help that he wasn't even in his own home, but perhaps that was the very reason he was feeling like this. As he stared out at the unfamiliar yet familiar bedding, he tried to not let it get to him. He had far more pressing issues to be dealing with right now. So he decided, like most of his issues, he would seal this away. He would deal with it later… or not. What Clark did with his issues was his own concern, not anyone else's.

He got up from the bed, and nearly stepped on another cat that had been sleeping on the floor. Very quickly he realized there were more cats in here than he first realized, and the fact that this was only now becoming apparent to him truly was a testament to how exhausted he had been last night.

After counting the number of cats in the room (seven), he went about getting freshened up. Given this room had an ensuite, he figured he'd take advantage of it and do the one thing everyone had been nagging him to do for what felt like months.

He stepped inside and was confronted with even more feelings of nausea-inducing dejavu. The room was fitting with marble tiles, and sure enough, the appliances themselves glittered with a gold finish. These however were not the cause for the ache developing in Clark's stomach. What was causing it were small seashell shaped soaps in a bowl to the side of the sink, the kind no one would ever use to wash their hands. As he stared at them he could have sworn he heard the faintest voice in his ears. *'That's the point, Clark, they're just there to look nice.'*

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Maybe he didn't need to shower. He'd managed four years without one, after all. Another year wouldn't kill him. No, a bucket and rag was all he needed, the shower head just felt superfluous.

~~*Just get in the shower. Come on, it's not that hard.*~~

Apparently it was if Clark's glacial movements were anything to go by. He stripped off his clothes and left them in a pile on the floor as he went to assess the shower cubicle. It was far more complicated than any shower had any right to be, and so it was with mild dubiousness that he turned one of the

handles. When water hit his scalp, he let out a small gasp as it first ran cold, but eventually the water grew warm and he was able to wash himself.

He lathered himself with soap and as he looked down at his feet, he saw that the water coming off of his body was not the same colour as the stuff coming out of the shower head. With his lips pressed into a fine line, he stared down at the dirt tinged water and realized that this really was a long time coming.

He also couldn't place why exactly he had been so averse to shower. Now that he was in the stream of warm water, he felt so much better, he even wondered if Selina had a razor that he might have a go at shaving his beard.

But that sickly feeling was still lingering. Despite how nice it all felt, there was a feeling gnawing in the pit of his stomach; a feeling that Clark was all too familiar with.

Guilt.

Suddenly, the warm water against his skin felt tepid at best. He turned it off, and stared at the tiles as the droplets slowly slid down them. He felt guilty; he could gather that much. It was the 'why' that was still evading him. Though it wasn't evading him so much as he was evading it. He knew the cause. It was the cause of most of his guilt. A cause that was now very fresh in his mind due to this morning.

Despite how hard he was trying to get over what had happened in Metropolis, it felt as though what little progress he had been making was getting swallowed by memories beyond his control. No longer was it just the quake that was haunting him-- the sight of Lois falling. It was the memories before that day happened; Lois lying beside him in bed, Lois shopping for soaps, and as he closed his eyes in the shower cubicle he could even imagine Lois slipping in quietly and setting his clothes on the counter ready for when he'd come out.

As he stepped out of the shower though, there were no fresh clothes waiting for him, only the pile he had left there himself. He prodded it with his foot and after wrapping a towel around himself, he endeavoured to find something nicer to wear.

Despite the towel, he still looked up and down the corridor before heading down to where he knew Slade's room resided. He could already hear the comment he'd make when he'd knock and Slade opened the door, '*really, Kent? People will talk,* ' and of course Clark would have to explain that showing up at another man's room wearing only a towel was *not* a come on.

Thankfully, he didn't have to explain himself, nor hear Slade's remarks. He wasn't there. His room was empty, and Clark would have been more concerned if he wasn't secretly happy that was the case.

He found the dresser and when he pulled it open, he was happy to see normal clothes within and nothing orange and black. After finding a shirt, some pants, and underwear he went back to his own room to put them on. They were nothing to write home about but it didn't matter to him as they served his purposes well.

After getting dressed, he scooped up his clothes and went down stairs. If he was going to be here for a while, he might as well take advantage of the washer.

It took him a while to find said washer. It was in it's own little laundry room, replete with washing hampers, and a dryer. Though the hampers looked like a moot point given that the two labelled for the boys simply had piles of clothes in front of them rather than in them. Clark did not envy Selina raising the boys. Now that they were teenagers he was sure this type of thing was par for the course.

~~*You know, you're going to have teenagers eventually. Wonder what yours will be like.*~~

He grimaced. It was far too early to be thinking of that.

He pushed that thought away as he threw his clothes into the washer and made his way to the kitchen, hoping to find enough coffee to make him feel alive.

A part of him had expected there to be a number of people inside already. After all, Slade hadn't been in his room and Clark had therefore assumed he must already be down here, but a quick scan of the kitchen and then the rest of the house revealed that he wasn't here at all. By the sounds of it, most of the island was still asleep with only the faint sounds of clinking spoons in coffee cups, cereal pouring into bowls and also and ambulance being heard over the general silence of the early morning.

But in this home, there was only one person awake, and that person was sitting at the kitchen counter before him.

The moment Clark saw her, his mouth fell open. "Barbara."

Her eyes flew to the door at the sound of her name, and when they saw Clark they only grew wider. Her mouth moved with unsaid words until eventually one didn't so much as come as stumble out. “Hi.”

Clark remained frozen for a moment, his brain pouring over the word as though trying to find the hidden complexities within it. Very quickly he realized there were none and as such he raised a brow, his face awash with confusion. “*Hi* ?”

Barbara frowned. “What do you want from me? I didn’t expect you of all people to be walking into the kitchen!”

Clark made a face though eventually nodded. “Yeah, I stayed the night. You were asleep when I got here.”

“Right…” Barbara said as she looked away. After a moment, her eyes were back on Clark, narrowed in apprehension. “*Why* did you stay the night?”

“You missed a lot last night.” Clark said as he approached the counter and started the coffee maker. “But all you need to know is that I know about Tim going missing.”

The words had their intended effects as Barbara's shoulders visibly loosened. “And you didn’t have anything to do with it, did you?”

“No, I didn't.”

Barbara let out a breath, bringing her mug to her lips. “See, I knew that. I told Selina as much, but Jason kept filling her head with all these theories and I think you showing up here just made her believe them even more. She really thought you were going to try and ransom Tim, before you, you know, ran away.”

“Is that why she sent Slade to come kill me, then?” Clark asked, raising a brow.

He perhaps should have waited to say that when Barbara wasn't drinking, as she quickly ejected the contents of her mouth onto the counter as she whirled on him. "She did *what* ?"

"Oh, did they leave out that tidbit?"

"I thought…" Barbara shook her head. "I thought they were just intimidating you! I didn't think they were being serious when Jason started saying they were going to kill you!" She let out a groan as she rubbed her forehead. "Clark, if I knew, I wouldn't have let them, I promise."

Clark however only waved his hand. He looked at the pot of coffee briefly. A small dribble of liquid was coming from the grinds now. "Eh, no harm done."

Barbara nodded at that. "Yeah, which is saying a lot. I don't know much about what Mr. Wilson does, but I've heard he can be *very* scary."

"Are you scared of him?" Clark asked, genuinely curious.

Barbara didn't even pause. "No, I know he wouldn't hurt me." A small smile touched her lips.

"Right." Clark said as he glanced at the pot beside him once more. There was now enough liquid at the bottom for a cup but he let it keep going. "So are you just gonna stay here with the Kyle's now? You're not even a *little* tempted to go talk to your aunt?"

Barbara looked away. "Nope."

Clark let out a sigh. "Barbara--"

"No, you don't get to come here and start talking to me about her." She snapped. "You don't know what she's done, so just drop it."

“So tell me what she did.” He said.

“It’s complicated.”

“It’s a good thing I have time, then.”

Barbara looked at him, her eyebrows still furrowed together. Clark wondered if she would just ignore him, maybe even leave the room. She didn’t do either of those, instead choosing to pull her cup into her hands and stare down at the liquid. “She lied to me.”

“Okay…” Clark said slowly. “About what?”

“About everything.” Barbara muttered as she shook her head. “About my dad, about our family, but the most important thing she hid from me was about our blood, about what we *really* are.”

Clark raised a brow. “What are you?”

Barbara looked at him and took a deep breath. “I’m a blackfin.”

Clark took in that expression and found himself nodding. Despite having an inkling that that was the case, hearing it aloud made everything suddenly slot together in his mind. Lucy’s acceptance of mers. Her sheltering of Barbara. Even her hesitance towards the Kyle’s. “I see.” Was all he said.

Barbara raised an eyebrow. “That’s it?”

“Sorry, did you want a more bewildered response?”

“I just…” She made a face. “Did aunt-- I mean, *Lucy*, tell you?”

“Nope.” Clark said, shaking his head. “But I know the Kyle’s are blackfins and I suppose it just made sense that you’d be one too. But if you’d like, I can try and sound more shocked at the revelation.”

That caused a smile as Barbara shook her head. “Yeah, I appreciate the thought, but that’s okay.”

Clark reached for the now full pot of coffee and poured some into a mug. He then leant back against the counter and eyed Barbara once more as he took a sip. “So that’s what she did? She hid the fact you were blackfin’s from you?”

Barbara’s expression soured. “I thought we were done talking about her.”

“We would be if you told me what she actually *did* .”

“That is what she did. She hid who I am from me.” Barbara ground out. “She told me to keep away from Dick because she didn’t want me finding out I was a blackfin, and the worst part is, she won’t even admit what she did was wrong.”

Clark took a long draw from his coffee. “Was it wrong?”

Barbara levelled his stare. “Uh, yeah, you don’t lie about that sort of thing to your family.”

Clark looked up at the ceiling in thought. “For the first thirteen years of my life, I had no idea I was an alien because my parents kept it from me.”

When he turned his attention back towards Barbara, the bewildered expression from earlier was back. “*What* ?”

“Oh, yeah, the other thing you missed last night. I’m Superman.”

Barbara's eyes grew wider. “You’re… *you’re* ….”

“Superman, yeah.” Clark said, reaching over for the coffee pot and filling his cup up once more. “But that’s beside the point. The point I was trying to make was that my parents kept who I was from me for years. When I started getting superpowers they excused it as me being ‘special’ and I believed them.”

Clark remembers it all so clearly. How his parents excused all of his supernatural abilities so casually, afraid or perhaps unsure of how to explain it to him so that he might understand. It was so easy to lie, to explain away these occurrences in a way that didn’t invoke further questioning. That was why Clark never did. Even after the first time he lifted the tractor off the ground because his marble had rolled underneath it. Or after the first time he heard his mothers heartbeat whilst he had been in school. Or even the first time their cat got stuck in a tree and he flew up to get her down. ~~*And of course there was the first time you went all the way to the bottom of the ocean and saw--*~~

The thought startled him back to reality, back to Barbara's concerned and dubious expression. Clark cleared his mind with a shake of the head and continued. “They didn’t want to overwhelm me with all of that. They also didn’t know *how* they’d go about explaining it all to me until eventually, when I turned thirteen, they said I was old enough to finally know. They explained it all to me, even showed me the ship I came to earth on, and despite how much it stung to find out I had been lied to for so long, I understood *why* they did it.”

“Finding out your parents aren't really your parents is one thing, finding out they’re not your parents *and* you're an alien from a planet that doesn’t exist anymore is another entirely. I might not have been the model of maturity at thirteen but I was able to handle the information better than I knew I would have done at a younger age. Sure, that meant more years of lies, but it also meant less years of trying to grapple with a truth you can barely comprehend.”

“Lies have a purpose. People lie all the time, sometimes they’re bad, sometimes they’re good. Sometimes they come from a place of care, sometimes from hurt. What you need to understand is that Lucy didn’t lie to you out of malice, she didn’t lie because she wanted to hurt you. She lied because she *cared*.”

This time when he looked at Barbara, her frown was replaced with a sombre stare that only grew more overt when she looked at Clark. “Still doesn’t make it hurt less.”

“And I get that. I’m not saying run over there and forgive her right this second. All I'm saying is that

you should at least talk to her about all this. She might have better reasons for why she lied than you realize, and you don't know because you don't *want* to know."

At that, Barbara looked down at her tea, though she didn't take another sip, opting instead to get up and walk to the sink with it, emptying it out. "Alright."

"Alright?" Clark repeated, raising a brow.

"I'm not forgiving her." Barbara said resolutely. "But she does deserve to explain why she did it."

"Right." Clark said, offering a smile. "Good to hear."

"Yeah, '*Good* '." Barbara repeated with a roll of the eyes. "For *you* maybe, but you just turned my lazy morning into an exercise in anxiety management." She shook her head with a sign. "Maybe Dick can come with me when I go talk to her?"

"If you think it will help." Clark said, pouring the remnants of his own coffee into the sink. "Now, I'm gonna go check on Blue."

"Blue?" She asked as she watched Clark leave.

"Seriously, get Dick to explain everything that happened last night or else you're gonna be asking a lot of questions today." Clark called out over his shoulder as he walked out of the room.

He only got slightly lost on his way to the pool. For one, the place looked different since the last time he had been here, and for another, he was mildly curious about the now finished rooms along the way. He'd poke his head inside, let out a hum of appreciation as he appraised it, close the door, forget where he was going, rinse and repeat. Eventually he saw the large double doors he knew led to the spa and opened them. This time, as he looked around, there was no hum of appreciation, just a simple gasp.

It looked incredible. Now that it was finished the artificial beach even ebbed and flowed like the tide. The pool however, didn't taper off gently like a beach would, as after several meters of 'shore', the

tank-like portion of the pool started, creating a sharp descent all the way to the bottom. He approached the pool, stepping along the shore until his feet were just along the edge leading into the main tank. He peered all the way to the bottom and as he did, a strange feeling of nostalgia washed over him. He couldn't place why he was feeling it, but there was something about the drop off that reminded him of somewhere he had been once before.

He however chose not to dwell on that feeling, focusing his attention instead on the foliage and rocks along the bottom of the tank. He was looking for something, or more accurately, someone, down at the bottom and when he spotted the dark lump he kicked the water with his foot to cause a splash. "Hey, Blue. Wakeup." He yelled.

Either because he was ignoring him, or because he was genuinely asleep, Blue didn't respond. Clark gave him a few more minutes and when he didn't see him stir, he looked around and found a few rocks up along the shore near the wall. Most likely, they were just there for decoration, but he still picked one up and threw it into the water. About a minute later Blue's irate face was floating along the furnace, his eyes still half closed with sleep. 'A S S H O L E.' He signed.

"Sorry." Clark said, feigning remorse. "You sleep okay?"

Blue rolled his eyes. 'I *WAS* S L E E P I N G G R E A T.'

"Right, right, again, sorry…" Clark said as he came up close to the edge again. He looked down into the water, and again felt the nostalgic pang. ~~*Did you want to go into the water?*~~

A swell of panic rushed through him at the thought and all of a sudden he stepped away from the edge, over to where the artificial shore ended and there was only tiling. He fell against it and brought his hands to his face. He was not himself this morning, that much was certain. He could understand why. With everything going on, it was all just piling on top of him. That's all it was. He had done such a good job of avoiding responsibilities for four years that suddenly having a bunch of them all at once was just causing him to slowly break.

Even that voice he was hearing; that cruel imitation of Lois' voice was slowly coming back to him, but unlike before, there was no malice there, no hidden anger, it was wholly devoid of any emotion. What vestiges of Clark's mind it was coming from now, Clark didn't know, and more importantly, he didn't *want* to know.

It was only a few moments after he sat down that he heard the water splashing and when he moved his hands to peek through his fingers, he found Blue's face right there before him. He chirped a few times, bringing his hand out to brush Clark's hair back. It was still damp from the shower. "Sorry." Clark said, bringing his hands down and taking a breath. "Just feeling…" he pressed his lips together. "It's just a lot, you know? There is a lot going on, between you, your family, the fact that you're--" he cleared his throat. "That you're pregnant, I just… I don't know what to do. Am I alone in feeling like that, or are you as overwhelmed as I am?"

When he chanced a look up at Blue, he saw his expression was remarkably sombre. He sat back onto his rear and brought his hands up. 'O F C O U R S E I A M.'

Clark shrugged. "You're doing a good job of hiding it then…"

Blue however only rolled his eyes and then tapped his forehead. 'I F Y O U C O U L D H E A R M E, Y O U W O U L D N 'T B E S A Y I N G T H A T.'

"Well, I can't hear you." Clark responded, but there was no venom there, only resignation. "I know signing is not the same, but I'm telling you, I will watch you sign for as long as it takes for you to say what you need to say. Just tell me what's going on in your head." He inched forward. "*Please*."

Blue's eyes drifted away from him, turning to the water. Eventually he brought his hands up again, and this time he signed. 'I' M S C A R E D.'

Clark inched forward even further, not caring if his pants got wet. "*Of?* "

Blue let out a humourless huff of laughter. 'E V E R Y T H I N G.' Then Clark did exactly what he had promised, he watched as Blue signed. 'I' M S C A R E D O F B E I N G A D A D A G A I N. I' M S C A R E D O F G I V I N G B I R T H. I' M S C A R E D O F B E C O M I N G A B R O O D M O T H E R. I' M S C A R E D O F L O S I N G T I M. I' M S C A R E D O F L O S I N G Y O U. I' M--"

"Whoa, whoa." Clark said, holding up his hands. "I hate to break it to you, but you're stuck with me." He brought his hand out, resting it on the small of Blue's back. "I thought you knew that…" He whispered.

Blue's face looked hopeful for one moment, before his jaw clenched and he averted his gaze. 'Y O U D O N' T K N O W.'

"Know what?" Clark said, trying to catch his eye as the mer looked everywhere but at him. "B, come on, talk to me."

It took a few minutes, most of which were spent with Clark rubbing Blue's back in gentle circles. Eventually though, he turned those steely eyes towards him, and raised his hands. 'I' M N O T G O I N G T O S T A Y L I K E T H I S.'

That piqued Clark's interest. His brow raised as he thought over those words. "What do you mean?"

Blue looked frustrated, embarrassed, and most of all, angry. 'M Y *B O D Y* I S G O I N G T O C H A N G E.'

A confused frown was Clark's response, and then he simply shrugged. "Pregnancy will do that, B. I can handle you getting 'rounder' if that's what you're worried about." Clark then pressed his lips together. "I don't think it *is* , but…"

Sure enough, Blue nodded. 'D I F F I R E N T C H A N G E.'

At that, Slade's words from last night came back to him. *'I guess it's because Bruce is transitioning to a broodmother. If that's the case his slick's only gonna get more acidic, you know.'* "Because you're becoming a broodmother?" Clark offered instead, raising a brow. "And being one changes your body? And because of that 'change', you think I'm gonna leave you?"

Blue didn't move for a minute, his eyes towards the water, then, he gave a single nod.

Clark let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. "Well, alright then, so you're gonna be a broodmother, I can handle that." He raised his eyebrows. "I mean, you'll have to tell me *what* exactly that involves, but when you do, I can promise you B, I'm not gonna go running."

He could tell Blue didn't believe him. His eyes remained fixed on the water and only after Clark leant in close to him, resting his head on his shoulder did he eventually move, pressing his face against the top of Clark's head. He kissed it and then pulled back.

He brought his hands back up to sign, but this time, stopped. His eyes went towards the doorway instead and when Clark looked over there, he was surprised he hadn't heard it opening.

Slade leant against the frame of the door. His arms crossed. "How's it going in here?"

"We were just talking." Clark said.

"Anything interesting?"

"Why are you here Slade?" Clark asked, is patience growing thin.

"Am I not allowed to check in on you guys?"

Clark rolled his eyes. "*Slade*."

He held up his hands. "I mean it. I was just checking in on you." He then paused. "Well, Bruce. You just so happened to be here too so I guess I'm checking up on the pair of you."

Clark wanted to retort, but instead found himself frowning as a thought came to him. "Where were you this morning?"

"Where *was* I?" Slade asked as he walked up to the pair. "I was sleeping."

Clark raised a brow. "No you weren't."

Slade smiled at that, and once he was by them, he sat on the floor beside Clark. “So you *did* go into my room.”

Clark opened his mouth, before he closed it again with an apologetic look. “Sorry. I needed clothes, and--”

Slade held up his hand. “Not a problem, I don't keep anything in there worth hiding anyway. My good dildos are back in Sacramento.” At that, he trailed his eye up and down Clark's body before giving a small nod. “The clothes look good on you, by the way.”

Blue gave the fainted growl, to which Slade held up both his hands. “I just said he looked nice, Bruce. *Jesus*. It wasn’t like I was asking to suck his cock.”

“*Lovely*." Clark muttered, with a grimace. “Now that you’ve succeeded in making me feel uncomfortable so early in the day, why don’t you tell me what you were doing this morning if you weren't in your room?”

Slade eyed him then, the barest smile touching his lips. “You really want to know that badly? It was nothing interesting.”

“With you Slade, I doubt that.”

He gave a cocky smile. “Because I'm so interesting?”

“Because I'm worried you did something bad.”

Slade blew a raspberry. “Please, I don't do bad things. Just good things that some people think are bad.”

When Clark chanced a look at Blue, his own expression was mirrored on the mers. All downturned lips and furrowed brows. He turned back to Slade. “I mean it, what were you doing?”

“Getting a colonic.”

“Slade.”

“Alright, hemorrhoid treatment, can’t sit for too long or else--”

“*Slade* !”

“Alright, alright….” He held up his hands. “I *may* have killed Antonio.”

“Sla--” but that was all that managed to get out as the rest of the word died in his throat. He stared at Slade, first for a minute, then for two, until eventually it felt as though he had spent the last quarter century staring at the man. He also realized his mouth had grown dry from remaining open for so long, and when he finally felt capable of sound he had to close his mouth and will the saliva back into it before he even dared to speak. “You did what?” He asked, surprised by how even his voice was.

Even Blue, for all intents and purposes, looked surprised. Though not in the same vein as Clark. His was more a surprise from something unexpected occurring, whereas Clark's, well Clark’s had caused him to become a statue for three minutes.

“Well, after what you told me, I didn't want to wait and give him an opportunity to prepare or warn Hadal, so I showed up there last night, spoke to him for a while, then killed him. Then I went to Sacramento to--”

“I don’t care about that, what you’re saying is; you killed him." Clark realized he should probably blink. He didn’t. But he realized he should. “You *killed* Antonio.”

It wasn’t a question, yet Slade still responded as if it was one. “Yes.”

All at once, the disbelief that he had been experiencing evaporated, leaving only the stark realization that Slade was being one hundred percent serious. Clark's eyes blew wide as he rushed to his feet, intending to go somewhere, though not knowing where. He ended up pacing. “What the fuck, *what the fuck*, Slade! Why the fuck would you do that?”

Slade for the most part looked as unbothered as he had when he first walked in. In fact, he looked even more at ease as he leant back onto his elbows and raised a brow towards Clark. “Were you making up all that shit you told me yesterday, ‘cause I could have sworn you said he tried to kill *you* .”

Clark faltered at that. He stopped pacing, though that didn’t mean much as his body remained filled with unreleased energy. He now went onto ringing his hands as he shook his head emphatically. “Yes, *I know* I said that, but I figured you would have shown more tact than just killing him!”

“*Just* killing him?” Slade asked, and Clark didn’t want to know what it meant that Slade looked offended by that one word. “You think I *just* kill anyone? No no no. I take great pride in my work. No one will know he was killed, only we will ever know the truth.”

Clark however didn’t have enough in him to try and discern Slade’s cryptic comments and only stared wide eyed at the man.

Eventually, Slade took a deep breath and rolled his eyes. “Suicide. I made it look like suicide.”

Clark didn’t know what it said about him that those words eased him. “You did?” He asked dubiously.

“Yeah, I told you. I went there after everyone went to bed. His wife was on a night shift, so I showed up at his home, quizzed him about what he knew, and he told me everything, gave me all information he had. I then got him to write a letter saying he was sorry but the guilt of what he did got to him, and then I made him hang himself.”

Clark stared at him. “You made him… *hang* himself…”

“It’s easier to do that you think." Slade said, as he looked down at his nail beds. “You tell them the choices are hanging or slowly cutting off portions of their limbs and then inserting them into some unsavoury areas before you burn them and their partner alive, and they tend to pick the first option very quickly.”

Clark looked away. “Unbelievable…”

“Yet, completely believable.” Slade said with a wink. “Point is, his wife will think it’s a suicide, I know what I need to know, and we can go give Hadal the same treatment.” Slade made a face at that. “Well, not the *same* treatment. For one, I’m not giving him an easy way out. No, for him it's going to be--”

“I don’t want to know.” Clark said, holding his hand up. “Jesus, Slade, I'm still dealing with the fact you’ve murdered someone I know.”

“Yeah, and now the world is down a mer poacher.” Slade said with a shake of the head. “You’re really gonna have to get used to that if you want to be of any use to me when we take down Hadal. I don't want you to grow a conscious as I'm interrogating him, because in case you didn’t realize, this needs to go well or we might as well hold Tim’s funeral now.”

Slade's words had their intended effect as he let out a sigh. “I know. I get that, it’s just… it’s way too early for this…”

“You’re telling me, I've been up all night. I’m beat.” As though to illustrate his point, Slade let out a yawn as he stood. “Hence why I went back to Sacramento to pick up my boys and swap boats. They'll take you back to your island whilst I get some shut eye and from there we can go straight to Hadal.”

“Wait, wait, wait. *Boys* ?” Clark asked, raising a brow. “You’re bringing Dick and Jason?”

“No, no. *My* boys. *My* sons." Slade said, and when Clark's face only grew more confused he brought this hand to his chin and rubbed the stubble there. “...Did I not mention them?”

Clarks mouth fell open as he mimicked Slade's posture, though far more exaggerated. “Hum, let me think, did you mention them… no! No you did not!” He threw his hands up as he spoke. “How many kids do you have exactly?”

Slade however still looked pensive. “But I could have sworn I… Oh, no…” He nodded slowly. “I mentioned Rose, but I didn't... Okay, I'm seeing why there is confusion.” Slade brought his hands to his hips. “Yeah, I have two boys, Grant and Joey. I had ‘em before I met Selina and Bruce. They help me on dives as well as my… *Other* work.”

It was somewhat startling how easy it was for Clark to get used to Slade's variety of BS. Even now he no longer felt shock and only numb acceptance at the news. Instead of further questioning, Clark heaved a sigh. “Of course you do, any other family members I need to know about or is that all for now?”

Slade actually took a moment to ponder that and Clark braced himself for the onslaught of cousins and half siblings but after a few tense moments Slade only shrugged. “Not any I can think of right now.”

“Wonderful.” Clark said with a sign. He then turned to Blue. “So are you ready to go?”

He nodded. ‘A S R E A D Y A S I W I L L E V E R B E.’

“Great.” Slade said with a clap of the hands. “Let’s head out, then.”

Clark carried Blue back outside to the beach, though this time he had to be more subtle about it given there was no cover of night to shield them. From the porch, he spied Slade’s boat at the dock, and unlike the one he’d seen yesterday, this one was far smaller and sleeker in design. He didn’t wait for Slade as he sped across the sand towards it, and when he got to the doorway he stepped in and set Blue down on the floor. Blue looked slightly dazed from the speed but after shaking his head he seemed less out of it. About ten seconds later, he heard Slade’s footsteps behind him and then his voice when he called out. “Grant, Joey. Get in here.”

Like insects appearing from woodwork, two heads quickly appeared in Clark’s field of vision, one from where you’d expect it; a doorway, and the other from a hatch in the floor. He looked at both men, and men was exactly what they were. Neither looked to be teens, or even young adults. Clark had to wonder how old they were exactly, and by extension, how old that made Slade. He offered a tense smile. “Hi.”

The men looked at one another, and there were a few minutes of quiet as they all looked to Blue, their silent conversation filling the air. It was strange to see their expressions shift as they remained quiet, but eventually he heard the man in the doorway clear his throat as he sent Clark a nod. “You Clark?”

“Uh, yes.”

“Grant.” The man said, pointing at himself. “That’s Joey. " He said pointing at the head in front of him. “That’s all you need to know for now.” He finished off with a jerk of his chin. Even with the limited amount of words, Clark could feel ‘Slade’ pouring off the man in spades.

“Alright, now that you’re introduced, I'm gonna get some shut eye. Grant, you’re in charge, don’t wake me unless someone is dying.” Slade didn’t say anything else before going through a door and shutting it after him. Once he was gone, Grant went back through the doorway he had been standing in, leaving Clark and Blue alone with the head in the floor.

He eyed Joey and then gestured to the hatchway. “Uh, is there a pool down there by any chance?”

Joey made a face and shook his head, the blond curls on his head moving as he did.

Clark raised a brow. “Where should I put Blue, then?”

At the question, Joey only looked more flustered. His hands twitched on the wooden floor and it was at that, that Blue brought his hands up. ‘H E C A N S I G N.’

Clark looked at the gestures and it wasn’t until he turned back to Joey and saw a smile now on his face that he realized they weren't for him. ‘W O N D E R F U L, T H A T M A K E S T H I N G S E A S I E R.’ Joey signed before he gestured to the doorway on the other side of the room. ‘T H E R E I S A T U B I N T H E R E, Y O U C A N S E T U N C L E B R U C E I N S I D E I T, I F Y O U’ D L I K E.’

“Wait, you know sign language?” Clark asked before catching himself. “Sorry--”’Y O U K N O W S I G N L A N G U A G E?’

Joey shook his head. ‘I’ M N O T D E A F. F E E L F R E E T O S P E A K, I D O N’ T M I N D.’

“You’re not deaf?” Clark asked, raising a brow.

As though sensing his question, Joey pulled down the scarf he was wearing and Clark spied the extensive scarring there as well as what looked like long divots on either side of his neck. ‘I’ M M U T E.’ He signed.

“*Oh*.” Clark let out, more to himself. “Sorry, Slade didn’t mention that.” Clark made a face. “Hell, he didn’t even tell me he *had* other kids until just now.” He muttered.

Joey nodded at that, his face revealing that what Clark had just said didn’t come as any sort of surprise to him. ‘H E D O E S T H A T.’ He signed and then, as though something caught his attention, he looked towards the doorway Clark knew Grant was behind. He was busy at the wheel, typing away on the console there. The boat began to move, and Clark cast one last look out the window towards the Kyle’s home.

Joey turned back to him, a polite smile now in place. ‘I B E T T E R G E T B A C K T O W O R K, N I C E M E E T I N G Y O U C L A R K.’

Joey ducked back down, the hatchway closing as he did. Despite already having a fair idea, he still turned his head to Blue, raising a brow. “Did they just sync?”

Blue nodded. ‘G R A N T W A N T S H I M T O P R E P T H E E Q U I P M E N T.’

“Got it.” Clark said with a nod as he took Blue in his arms and went through the doorway Joey had shown him. Inside the room was a cot as well as a tub already filled with water. It wasn’t nearly as lavish as the other boat Slade had used to come to his island, but he had a feeling this boat was for another purpose entirely.

Which begged the question as to why Slade used it to come to his island in the first place. It had been bigger, more luxurious and more importantly *less* conspicuous. There was no reason for him to bring it Clark's island when he was intending to kill him unless he really was as childish as Clark had every suspicion of him being.

Clark couldn’t help but frown at the thought as he set Blue in the water.

“I don’t know how you put up with Slade.” Clark said, laying down on the cot and suddenly feeling

all the more tired for it. “I’ve spent less than two hours cumulatively with the man and I'm already at my limit.”

When he chanced a look at Blue, he saw him genuinely pondering the question. Eventually he signed. ‘I JUST LIKE HIM.’

“Right, of course, I bet he’s very likable when he’s not being an ass.” Clark muttered.

This time when he looked at Blue, he only saw a smirk. ‘LIKE SOMEONE ELSE I KNOW.’

“Hey, now.” Clark said, sitting up. “I’m only an ass *half* the time, Slade seems to make it his full time career.” Blue however only shrugged and Clark's frown only grew. “You know you’re kind of an ass, too.”

Rather than grow petulant like Clark wanted him too, Blue only shrugged. ‘I KNOW.’

“Well, as long as we’re both clear on that...” Clark said, crossing his arms and in lieu of a petulant frown from Blue, he provided his own. “I’m *not* as bad as him…” he muttered.

Blue gave no signs to support or disagree with that claim, instead he reclined in the tub and closed his eyes. Clark however didn’t want to be accused of waking Blue up twice in one day, so when he noticed him slip lower into the tub, his breathing evening out, he stood up and left the room. A quick scan of the place showed Slade in much the same condition, Joey was below decks pouring over what Clark starkly realized were guns and Grant was sitting by the console, now reading a magazine and only occasionally looking out the front window of the boat.

Not wanting to disturb anyone, he decided to walk around the boat and explore. Though that only killed about five minutes. This boat was smaller than even Clark’s own, and not wanting to bother Joey below decks nor Grant in the cockpit meant he had the bathroom, and the kitchenette to explore. The bathroom itself provided little to do other than the obvious and the kitchenette was stocked with only the most minimal of foods. Clark however was growing hungry and unsure as to when he’d get a better chance, he used some of that five minutes to eat one of the many cereal bars that were inside the cabinets.

It was as he was on his second one that he heard a door open. Grant appeared in the doorway, and looked surprised when he saw Clark. “Oh yeah, you’re here.” He said as he shook his head as he walked past him to the same cabinet he had been rifling through. “You’re eating my bars, by the way.”

Clark looked down at the half eaten one in his hand. “Sorry, I didn’t--”

Grant however only shrugged, readjusting his scarf when he did. It was the same colour as the one Joey had been wearing. “It's not a big deal, just wanted to say before you had your third.”

“Really, I am sorry.” He now felt bad about finishing the rest of the bar currently in his hand, but figured leaving it half-eaten was even worse. “I’ll make it up to you, how much did they cost?”

Grant huffed a laugh at that as he reached for one of his own. “Yeah, seriously, it's not a big deal. Don’t worry about it.” He turned away from him then, heading back towards the doorway. He then paused, slowly turning to face Clark, an eyebrow cocked. “But there is something else you can do to make up for it.”

“Yeah?” Clark asked.

“Yeah, you can tell me how the Hell you got mixed up in all of this.”

“Oh.” Clark said, as he took a tentative bite from the cereal bar. “That’s a complicated question.”

“Great.” Grant nodded as he turned and left the room. “You can tell me all about it whilst I man the helm.”

Clark finished the rest of the bar in a few quick bites and a single rough swallow and then followed after Grant. When he got to the cockpit he took the seat beside him. Despite what Grant had said, he remained quiet as he ate the cereal bar and as such it was Clark who eventually broke the silence.

“I’m not gonna lie, after your introduction I didn't think you were a talker. In fact, I got the distinct impression that if I came in here you’d have told me to fuck off.”

That caused a huff of laughter. “That would be true if I didn't find you interesting. It really isn’t often that my dad goes out to kill someone and ends up working with them instead.”

“Really? From what I've heard, your dad is used to getting people he was going to kill to work for him.”

“Yeah, *for* him, not *with* him. The fact that you’re not tied up with a gun to your head right now tells me you are in fact an anomaly.”

Clark nodded at that and then offered a shrug. “I happen to know Hadal and he wants to use that to finally catch him.”

“Right." Grant said, clearly not convinced.

“It really doesn’t go beyond that.” Clark said earnestly. “He helped me when Blue-- I mean *Bruce* had… Cramps.”

“And because of that you took a abyssalfin to the only man in his hemisphere that would kill their own mother for one?” Grant asked, raising a brow.

“I didn’t have much of a choice. I needed advice and he could give it. I knew he was crazy about deep sea mers, but I guess I just wasn’t aware of *how* crazy.”

Grant nodded at that. “Yeah, he’s not someone to be taken lightly. It's why dad’s bringing me and Joey along this time, he won’t ever admit it, but he’s scared of Hadal.”

“He is?” Clark asked, looking through the wall to where Slade was sleeping. Despite being unconscious, his eyebrows were still furrowed together in concentration, and upon that sight he felt what he knew to be pity as he turned his attention back to Grant. “I didn’t think Slade *could* get scared.”

“It doesn't happen often, but it’s because of what happened last time. He’s worried if he fails again, then that’s it. His opportunity to stop Hadal, to stop the *whole* market, will be gone. I keep telling him there will always be another chance, that someone else will mess up eventually, but he won’t listen.”

Clark grew pensive. “He mentioned the last time he confronted Hadal. He said he distracted him and that’s how he got away.”

“‘*Distracted* ’." Grant gave a rueful smile. “You wanna know what the ‘distraction’ was?” He asked, and something in his tone told Clark he didn’t want to know, and yet…

“What did he do?” He asked.

“Hadal threw a baby blackfin into his pet shark tank.” Grant said as he tented his hands together. “Dad had a choice; let the baby die and get Hadal, or, save the baby and let Hadal get away.” Grant looked at him. “You can obviously tell what my dad did.”

“*Jesus Christ* .” Clark muttered. He screwed his eyes shut and yet he could swear he could still see the image before him as if he were happening. “What happened to the baby?”

“She was given back to her mother. Once my dad scoured the lab and found out Hadal had disappeared, he went about releasing all the mers Hadal had left behind. There were only five of them in total including the baby, but they went back into the water and wouldn't stop thanking my dad for saving them. But when dad came home that night, even though me, Joey, Selina, Rose, Hell everyone, told him he did the right thing, he still thinks he didn’t.”

“Why would he think that?” Clark asked. “He saved their lives.”

“Yeah, but in his mind, in saving that baby, he doomed countless other mers to an even worse fate.”

“So that’s what he’s worried about?” Clark asked. “He thinks Hadal is going to do something and escape again?”

“He’s *worried* because he is sending someone he cares about into a literal viper pit. Think about it, if

my dad let Hadal go for a baby he didn't even know, what do you think he's gonna do if Bruce's life is on the line?" Grant shook his head. "He doesn't just want this to go okay, he *needs* it to, otherwise, who knows what Hadal will do next."

"Well, he doesn't need to worry about Bruce with me there. Hadal can't do anything to him without me being aware of it."

"Yeah, he mentioned you were Superman." Grant eyed him. "He also mentioned you shouldn't get too cocky."

Clark would have been surprised if he hadn't already assumed Slade was the type of man to tell his secrets to anyone who would listen. "It's not being cocky. It's called being factual.

He shrugged. "Facts or not, Hadal has ties to the most influential and wealthy men on the planet. Stands to reason if he wants you dead, he can get it done."

"Which is why we're doing this now, and not when he's had time to prepare."

Grant didn't respond to that, opting instead to gesture out the window. "Looks like we're at your island." He then looked at the navigation screen and then out the window once more. His eyes narrowed in the direction of Clark's home. "There must be a mistake, this is--"

"Yeah, no, this is my place."

Grant eyed him wearily. "Right. You live… *there* ." He brought his hand up to rub the back of his head as his stare remained fixated on the small shack they approached. "So… did uncle Bruce not give you… *any* of his money?"

"Yeah, yeah, I live in a shit hole. I'm dealing with it, alright?" Clark rolled his eyes as he stood up. "I'm gonna grab B."

He left the room and found Blue much as he had left him, asleep in the tub. When he crouched down beside him, a hand outstretched, he gently shook his shoulder. "Blue? We're here."

It took a few seconds, but eventually Blue's eyes fluttered open, though it was with a wince. Clark's eyes went to where his hands were currently situated; pressed over his stomach. He gave a small grumble to which Clark frowned.

"You're stomach hurting again?"

Blue only shrugged. 'I' L L B E F I N E. J U S T C R A M P S.'

Clark wasn't convinced but he wasn't going to argue. Instead he waited until he felt the boat come to a stop, and then he gently eased Blue into his arms. When he stepped back out of the room, Joey's head was once more poking out from the hatchway and Grant was leaving the cockpit. "I'm gonna go wake dad, you can head on out if you want." He said to Clark before he went through the doorway Slade disappeared into earlier.

Clark did as he was told and left the boat, stepping out onto his dock and staring at his home. Despite what others might say about it, he couldn't help the comfort that the sight of it infused him with. This was his home. His sanctum. ~~*It's what you deserve.*~~

He winced as the last thought came and went through his mind. He had hoped being away from Kyle's residence would have quelled those thoughts, but really, he should have known it wouldn't.

He stepped down from the dock and set Blue down in the lapping water. He waited there until he heard footsteps approach him. Slade and the boys were all there and after stretching and rubbing the sleep from his eye, Slade gave a nod. "Right, so I better tell you the plan."

"That would be handy, yes." Clark said.

"Any chance we can talk inside?" Grant asked, holding his hand out over his eyes. "I know you've been gifted with melanin, Clark, but we all happen to be pasty fuckers who can't be in the sun for more than three minutes before we burn."

One look down at Blue showed that that sentiment was shared, and Clark only turned to look at his shack. "It's pretty cramped in there. We can, uh, talk in my boat?" He offered.

No one said anything, but the fact that everyone began moving towards his boat and Blue reached up for him told him that his suggestion was indeed heeded. He picked up Blue and after setting him down inside of his boat, he turned his attention back to Slade. “So the plan?” He prompted.

“Right, it’s simple enough. You call Hadal and arrange a meeting, you can give whatever reason you want but it's important that it's something you need to do in his lab, not just over the phone. Then, once you have the coordinates, you’ll go off ahead and we’ll follow a ways behind you ; Hadal’s likely to have sonar and the further back we stay the less likely he is to see us coming. Once you get inside the lab, me and the boys will work on breaking in and once we’re in, we can start interrogating him.”

“He kept the sub on the surface last time. Should be easy enough for you to get in.”

Slade narrowed his eye. “Now *why* would you say that? This isn’t going to be easy, so why would you jinx us like that? Do you *want* something bad to happen?”

Clark held up his hands. “I was just telling you what happened last time! I didn’t realize I couldn't inform you about that.”

He shook his head with a harsh sigh. “You need to understand--”

“Look, I get it. You're worried, but you don't need to be.” Clark brought his hands up and set them on Slade's shoulders. “Whatever happens; we’re going to stop Hadal today, alright? We’re going to get Tim back and we will make that bastard pay for what he has done.”

Slade’s face looked hopeful for one moment before it crumpled into a resigned frown. “I really wish I had your optimism.” He took a deep breath, and this time when he levelled his stare at Clark there was at least an attempt to project his usual confidence. “Just keep Bruce safe, alright? You might be invulnerable, but he’s not.”

“I won’t let Hadal hurt him.” Clark said with the utmost sincerity.

“Alright, then.” Slade clapped his hands together. “You want me here whilst you call Hadal or would you rather be alone?”

“Here.” He said and then with a burst of speed, he went to his cabin to retrieve his phone and then returned. He looked up at Slade and began pressing the buttons on the phone. “What if I mess up?” He asked.

“Then I'll kill you.” Slade said as he sent Clark what he assumed was a supportive smile.

“Thanks Slade, you really know how to comfort me.” Clark muttered as he pressed the button to dial. It took a few rings but eventually he heard a voice on the other end.

“Hello?”

“Yeah, Dr. Hadal?” He paused for a moment, his heart suddenly hammering. “It’s Clark.”

There was total silence as everyone in the room remained still, as though fearing even one floorboard creaking would give them away. As Hadal remained quiet and the seconds ticked by, Clark’s heart rate only climbed higher until he heard a quiet laugh. “You’ve not run out of morphine already, have you?”

Clark grimaced. He didn’t even want to imagine if that were case. ‘*Yes doctor, I pumped my partner up with enough morphine to sedate a whale and I need more. Oh, what's that? That amount would kill a mer? It’s funny you should say that …*’ he shook his head at the thought. “No, no. It's not that. I mean, it’s about the morphine, just not *that* . I’m worried about the effect it's having on Blue.”

There was another pause. “Right. So you want to go down a different avenue for pain relief all together or just alter the dosages of the morphine?”

What would get me into his boat , he thought. “A different avenue altogether.” He said as he eyed Slade to see if he was doing good, and one single, barely perceivable nod was his response. “I’m really sorry to keep bothering you with all this doc, but if I could come by today to talk it over I'd really appreciate it.”

This was it. Clark pressed his lips together into a line as he waited.

Eventually he heard another breathy laugh. “Clark, it really is no bother. Of course you can come by my lab.”

“Really? Thanks, doc.” Clark said, biting his lip.

“Alright then, shall I send over my current coordinates?”

Clark nodded to Slade who leant in closer. “Yeah, go for it.”

As he read out the numbers Slade was already typing them into his phone. Clark only nodded along and once Hadal was done he went over the numbers in his mind. They were different from the ones he had given yesterday. Mobile lab, indeed. “I shall be seeing you soon, Clark.” Was all Hadal said, and after a quiet goodbye on Clark’s end, the line went dead. He eyed Slade.

“Well?” He asked.

“Got them.” Slade said as he slid his phone into his pocket. “You did good. You sounded earnest, if a little anxious, but given what you were talking about it made sense, so.”

“Yeah.” Clark agreed as he slid his own phone into his pocket with a shaky breath. “So is this it? We’re heading over there now?”

“Yeah, but don’t worry, we’ll be right behind you.” As he said this, Joey stepped forward, handing something to Slade who then approached Clark and deftly slid it under his shirt collar. “A listening device. We would give you an earpiece to talk to you through, but Hadal might spot it.”

“I also have super hearing.” Clark said, pointing at his ear. “I'll be sure to listen out for you once we’re inside.”

“Good, now I know saying this to you is going to sound redundant given how you reacted to the ‘Antonio’ news this morning but it's important you *don’t* kill Hadal. I need him alive. If things start to get hairy, just incapacitate him. Cut off his legs or knock him out, but whatever you do, do *not* let him die.” With that said, he then turned his attention to Blue. He approached the mer and then crouched down. He brought his head close to his and for a very real moment, Clark thought they might even kiss. What he would have done if that *had* happened, he didn’t know. But in the end all they did was press their foreheads together. “You stay safe alright, B?” He whispered

A quiet chirp was Blue's response and when Slade turned to face him. Joey and Grant were already leaving the boat. “See you on the other side, Clark.”

Once they’d all left, Clark made another trip to the cabin to grab his tub. After filling it with water, bringing it inside and setting Blue within it, he put the coordinates into his navigator and after seeing what direction to head, he set sail.

The lab was a similar distance as it had been yesterday, but perhaps it was the nerves or something else entirely, that made the trip feel so much longer. By the time Clark came to a stop and spotted the massive structure just beneath the waves, he felt as though he had aged a number of years and after the sub emerged and he saw Elijah’s head poking from the hatchway, he felt like he had aged even more.

The trip inside went almost exactly the same as it had last time, right up to Elijah going down the stairs with the walkway still extended. Clark gave one last look outside and in the distance, he saw a small boat approaching. Once he saw that, he took a deep breath, readjusted Blue in his arms, and followed Hadal down into his lab.

Despite only being here yesterday. The place felt different, somehow. Heavier. As though the air itself was weighing down on him. He told himself it was nerves. Despite being dubious of Hadal yesterday, he didn’t know half of what he knew now-- all the stuff that made the man before him a walking nightmare.

Yet, he still did such a good job of hiding it, sending Clark the most earnest of smiles as he asked him to set Blue on the table.

“Why do I need to put him on the table?” He asked, eyeing it. Unlike yesterday, the metal surface of this one was cut into several sections rather than just being one long slab. “I thought we were just gonna discuss dosages.”

Hadal didn’t look offended by the question and slipped on a pair of gloves as he spoke. “I want to take a vial of his blood to see if there is a reason the morphine is making him particularly drowsy. I promise I'll be quick. He won’t even feel it.”

Just put him on the table. It will be more suspicious if you don’t. “Alright then.” He said hoping his reluctance came across more as general nervousness. As he set Blue’s tub on the ground and lifted him up, he trained his hearing for a moment. He heard crashing waves, they were closer now. *Five minutes out, at best.*

As Clark set Blue down on the metal, the mer let out a quiet yelp. He rubbed his rear and as Clark stepped back, he whispered an apology. He must have set him down harder than he thought.

He turned his attention to Hadal and the man simply crossed his arms and regarded him.

He didn’t move, and Clark looked between him and Blue who himself began to look concerned. “Aren't you going to take his blood?”

“In a moment.” Hadal said, remaining still. “I just wanted to ask you a question before I did.”

Don’t over react. He doesn't know. Stop sweating, Jesus Christ. “...And that is?”

“Why did you *really* want to come back to my lab today?”

Clark swallowed. “What do you mean?” *Four minutes.* “I told you, I wanted to adjust the dosages. You said--”

“I *said* to come back to tweak them, but the fact that you did it the very next day, without even attempting to follow my instructions. Well, it just struck me as very odd.”

“And I told you *why* . I didn’t like how drowsy it was making him. I get that he’s nocturnal, but he shouldn’t be falling asleep just like--” But Clark snapped his mouth shut. As he looked at Blue, he noticed his eyes were sliding closed. Clark felt his throat constrict. “...Blue?” He choked out.

“Is he falling asleep?” Hadal asked conversationally, tilting his head.

“Yeah, but why is he…” He listened for his heartbeat and found it slowing down drastically. “What the Hell, why is he--”

Hadal gave a small sigh of relief. “I’m glad to see the table is working. It was a rather crude design. A simple pressure plate system, but it did the trick. It administered the medication without you even noticing. Quite the achievement, really.”

Clark felt his eyes burning as he whirled on him. “You did what?”

“He’s quite alright, Clark. I wouldn’t dare hurt such a prized specimen.” Hadal said, as his hand slowly slid across the counter until it touched something small and rectangular there. “What you should perhaps be more worried about is yourself.”

Clark shook his head, as he clenched his fist. “You have made a *big* mistake.” *Three minutes.* “You have no idea who--”

“Who you are?” Hadal finished for him as he picked the item on the counter up. “I know you’re the strongest man on the planet. I know you’ve been told not to kill me. And I also happen to know you have the most comical weakness imaginable.”

Clark felt his blood run cold. “How did you--” he shook his head. “Never mind, what did you do to Blue, answer me or--”

“Or what?” Hadal said, a faint smile touching his face. He lifted up his hand and Clark saw now it was a remote he held.

Before he had time to react, Hadal’s thumb came down on the button. The whole sub lurched, and the sound of grinding metal came to his ears. They were going down, the whole structure of the submarine rumbling as it did.

Then, the room flooded with red light and within an instant there was a sound of rushing air as Clark felt something sharp collide with his chest. He stumbled backwards, trying to breath, but felt he could barely take in any air.

He felt weak, disoriented, and when he looked down at his now bloodied chest, he saw a faint green glow emanating from multiple spots in his abdomen, his eyes returned to Hadal who only smiled. “You really aren't the brightest, are you?”

Clark felt his legs give way, and then, he was out.

Chapter End Notes

The End :)

Could you imagine? XD Like I just went, yeah that's it, I know it's a downer ending but what were you expecting? I feel like more than just one of you would legitimately hunt me down XD

But yes, happy holidays all! I hope you had a great Christmas and enjoy this Boxing day treat. I had contemplated turning it into two smaller chapters, but I couldn't find a point in the middle that I wanted to split it at, so you get this one big chapter instead XD

But yes, so much happened in this chapter. Barbara is indeed a blackfin. Bruce's body will change when he becomes a broodmother. Clark's PTSD is back and worse than ever, and Slade is slowly becoming my favourite character to write. I don't care if he's nothing like the canon Slade, he's my baby now and I love him.

I sure do wonder what's going to happen next chapter (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) And as always, let me know your thoughts! And as I most likely won't update again until the new year, happy new year to you all and take care!

Chapter 35

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Darkness.

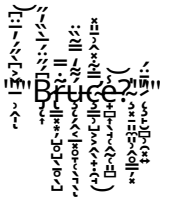
But somewhere,

In the distance,

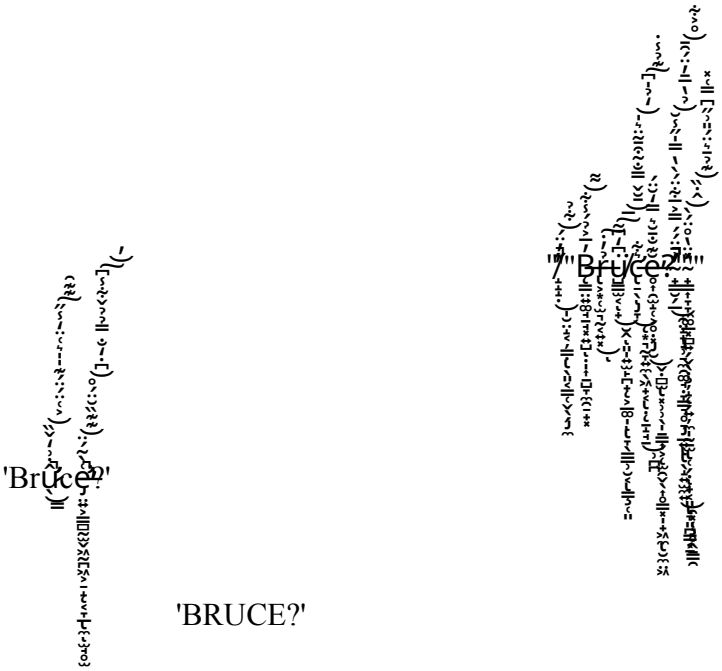
There was light.

'Bruce?'

'Bruce?'



'Bruce?'



'BRUCE?'

'B R U C E ?'

'Bruce?'

'B r u c e ?'

'Bruce?'

'Bruce, are you here?'

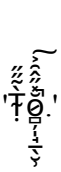
'I can’t… See you…'

'Answer…'

'...Me'

'Please?'

'The light.'

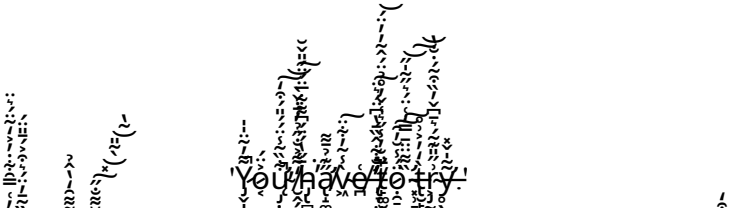


'I don’t know…'

'If I can move…'

'Everything…'

'Hurts…'



Clark did.

He tried.

He moved at what felt like a glacial pace, but slowly, the light got brighter.

Now, he could make out what it was, or more specifically, who.

'Bruce?'

'Bruce?'

'Bruce?'

'Bruce?'

‘BRUCE?’

The mer lifted his head, but it wasn’t who Clark was expecting. It was something else. It was the thing from his dreams, all sharp teeth and vacant eyes, the dead eel still in his hands and mouth. Clark felt himself retreating, his hands coming up to prevent the thing from advancing.

My hands…

They're so small…

'Clark.'

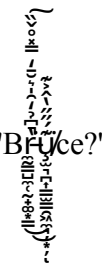
'It's me.'

'Do you not remember?'

Remember what ? He wanted to ask. He remembers the thing plaguing his dreams, haunting him, and yet, the longer he looks at that face, at those sorrowful eyes, the more that memory changed.

' *Bruce* ?'

'Bruce?'



'Bruce?'

'You're so small.'

'So were you.'

Slowly, the thing before him transformed, the teeth became less exposed, the eyes less severe. Hair grew out of the once barren crown, and now, what laid before him was a mer so small Clark felt as though he could scoop it up into his arms.

'Where are we?'

'We're in a memory.'

'This is where we first met.'

'Do you remember?'

It is ? Clark looked around, and slowly the nothingness retreated. Sand blossomed by his feet, a pool of smoky water rose from the ground.

The mer before him remained still, now crouched behind the dense clusters of mussels and rocks.

Clark tried to approach, but the mer flinched.

'Are you scared?'

'No, but I was.'

‘I didn’t know what you were.’

Clark frowned. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘There is no time to.’

‘Clark you need to listen to me.’

The small mer before him retreated even further away from the brine pool.

‘This memory is short. I don’t have time to explain, so listen. You need to wake up.’

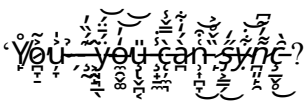
Clark stepped even further forward. ‘I’m asleep?’

‘Yes, and you need to wake up. Now.’

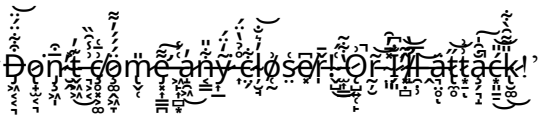
The small mer looked so scared, his mouth trembling as he stared at Clark.

Clark only wanted to get closer to it, he’d never seen a mer like it before.

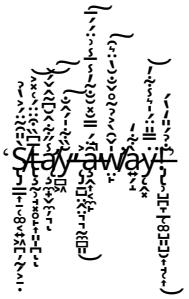
‘ *Why are you moving away from me* ?’



‘*What’s syncing* ?’



‘*But why? I’m not gonna hurt you* .’



The small mer turned then and swam away. As those words came into Clark’s mind, he let out a strangled gasp. Pain lanced through his skull, clear and bright. Salt water poured into his mouth when he'd opened it and he now began to desperately swim up toward where he knew the sky lay.

‘Wake up, Clark.’

‘You need.’

‘To wake.’

‘Up.’

He kept swimming, his arms jutting out in jagged movements. He kept going until the darkness faded away completely, leaving only placid blue in its wake. Then before him, he saw the shimmering surface of the water. He burst through it and swallowed down the crisp air.

The sunlight… It’s so bright…

Why…?

Why does it hurt so much…?

Why…?

…Why is it red?

As Clark opened his eyes, he was confronted with two things. Firstly, the pain in his chest, and then, the ache in his head. He could barely make out anything through the dim red light of the room, but he could see movement. It was blurred and with the limited light it was hard to make out much of anything, but slowly, as he blinked, more of the world became clear. It was then that he saw who was in front of him, and more importantly, it was then that he remembered where he was.

He tried to move, but no matter how hard he tried, it was as though his limbs no longer belonged to him. They were dead weights, succeeding only in contributing to his inability to shift so much as a millimetre.

He opened his mouth to try and speak but when he did, he was hit with the taste of blood. He coughed and felt a gurgle coming from deep within his chest.

That sound caused one of the shapes before him to come into focus. Soon, Elijah's face appeared just before his own. “I was wondering if you were going to wake up.” He said with a faint smile. “I’m pleased to see that you did.”

Clark tried to speak, but was left coughing up what he had to assume were his own lungs. He allowed himself to relish the small kernel of satisfaction he felt when a splattering of said blood ended up on Elijah's pristine lab coat. The doctor looked down at the stain with a grimace and pulled back. “Don’t strain yourself now. No telling how much time you have left.”

Hadal stepped back, approaching what he had been working on when Clark had awoken. His vision was better now, and Clark was able to see clearly what it was.

It was the tank.

The strange tank he’d seen the last time he had been here.

But more importantly, there was now someone in the tank.

“*Blue*…” he choked out, though it could barely be understood as the mer's name, coming out as nothing more than a murmur. The mer however, responded all the same, slamming his hand against the wall of the tank with a wail as he looked at Clark.

Alerted by the mer, Elijah turned to face him with an easy smile. “You're wondering what I'm doing, aren't you?” He clasped his hands together and leant against the tank. “Don’t worry. 'Blue' is perfectly safe in there. I’m just prepping the tank now for a little test. You see, I wasn’t lying when I said it was for research purposes.” He looked up in thought. “I just didn’t specify what *kind* of research.”

A harsh glare was Clark’s only response.

“You see, over the years I have developed many theories about deep sea fins. The lengths I went to to try and prove my theories, made me a pariah amongst my peers, but I was adamant about seeing my theories realized; to finally write a thesis on the matter that would be worth a damn, and not just that same useless twaddle we've read a million times before.” He took a breath to school himself and then carried on. “Thankfully, my acumen did not go unnoticed and as a result I was approached by some very powerful people to help develop a tool. A tool that would allow the wealthy of the world to own the rarest mer breeds without threat of them committing suicide.”

“Iron gills.” Hadal said fondly, as though remembering a pleasant memory. “They were my creation, my children as it were. Others had tried to create similar devices, but only mine was functional and easy on the eyes. After all, what good is a device that does the job but end up detracting from the beauty of the mers? As a result, once my device was finalised and on the market, I was finally able to acquire the mers I needed for my research. With my abundant wealth, I could undercut any auction house, or if need be, outbid whoever happened to be trying to bid for the mers I wanted. Then, with these mers I could finally begin my research in ernest. I could *finally* see which of my theories were correct. I won’t lie to you, Clark, some of them were wrong, but most of them,” he smiled, “most of them were right.”

“There was however one theory I needed an abyssal fin for. Not a cadaver, or a blackfin. No, a living, *breathing* abyssal fin.” A glint entered his eyes that chilled Clark to his very core as he turned his attention to Blue. “And when you happened to bring one into my lab... how could I say no?”

“You see the difference between a blackfin and a surface abyssal fin are minimal, but they are there. Firstly, there is the pelvis.” Hadal went over to the side of the lab and picked up something on the table. It was an x-ray. More specifically, it was the one he had taken of Blue only yesterday. He set it on the light box on the wall and turned it on. “Look at it. Notice how much smoother the bones are, curving along the flank. A blackfin’s pelvis is more like ours, though there is still a channel in the centre to allow for the spinal column to travel down into the tail.”

He turned away from the wall and approached the tank once more. “Then of course, there are the scales. You see, abyssal fins are curious for their temperature regulation. Blackfins, despite being closely related to abyssal fins, are warm blooded, most likely due to the *other* genes polluting their DNA. Meaning that the deeper they go, the more energy they must expend to maintain their body temperature. It’s why blackfins are ambush predators. To maintain the energy needed to live at deeper depths, they need more calories and there is no better way to get calories and not expend heaps of energy than by ambush. Abyssal fins on the other hand, are poikilothermic; their body temperature *changes*, and that change occurs dependent on depth.”

“At their native depths, at around eight thousand feet below surface, they are able to survive by keeping their blood at the same temperature as the water around them. As they rise up in the water, their blood gets warmer. With this, comes a noticeable change. Their *scales*. Normally black, the warmer water and blood that comes with it, causes the pigment in the cells to become less dense. The less dense the cells, the lighter the colour.”

“Then of course, my final theory; the womb. You see, whilst I had theorized that deep sea fins would exhibit sequential hermaphroditism, what I truly believed was that it was a trait *only* found in abyssal fins. After all, all of the blackfins I have examined over the years have bore no evidence of a primitive womb or testicles, and I wondered why that was the case. That was until the idea that it was *only* abyssal fins that had this ability, struck me. After that, it was one of the first things I would look for upon each new acquisition.”

“The fact that you brought one to me... One that was already pregnant to boot." Elijah kissed his fingers. “Oh, I couldn’t have asked for a better present. Of course, the mernans in the litter will have to be dealt with, but the half fins will be a treasure trove of research opportunities. God, can you imagine it? The *depths* they’d be able to withstand, the temperatures.” He let out an airy sigh. “I wonder if they’d even inherit any of your powers.”

“If you…” Clark choked out. “Hurt… my children… I will… *Kill* you…”

Elijah looked at him sympathetically. “Oh Clark, you’re not going to be killing anyone like that.” As though to illustrate his point, he came in close to Clark once more, though this time kept to the side and lifted Clark’s arm up and let it go, where it collided against Clark’s side with a thud. “You can’t even move. Whilst I knew the Kryptonite would be potent, I must say, I expected you to be a bit more 'with it'. It's not nearly as fun talking to you when you just sit there like a lump.”

“Fuck… *you* …” He managed to get out.

That however, only caused Elijah to smile. “That’s better. If you could keep that up whilst I demonstrate the tank to you, that would be *marvellous*.”

Clark wanted to defy him, but given that Elijah was very much correct that he was *not* able to move, he found he couldn’t. Instead he sat there, helpless, as Elijah approached the tank and started typing away on the panel there. From within the tank, Blue went to the corner Elijah stood, baring his teeth as he continued to pound on the glass and scream. “He truly is a wonderful specimen… his offspring will be magnificent.”

After some typing, Hadal’s hands fell to his side. The sound of whirring machinery filled the room and in the tank, Blue stilled, his face morphing into one of panic. He let out another scream as he began to swim around the tank, frantically hitting the surfaces as he did. After that, he swam upwards, trying to push up on the lid, but to no avail.

“The tank is designed to increase the pressure of the water whilst also lowering the temperature. It’s not a perfect replication of the depths of the ocean, but it is certainly better than nothing.” Hadal walked around the tank, staring at Blue intently as he did. He had given up on trying to lift the lid and was now back at the glass, pounding on it. “Creating a tank capable of being able to withstand those pressure changes was difficult, but the *true* challenge was trying to see if it worked without an abyssal fin to test it on. I had to resort to alternatives. Blackfins worked, of course, but anything over five hundred atmospheres crushed the mer to death. Found that out the hard way.”

Clark must have made a strangled sound as Elijah turned to him, exaggerated worry attached into his face. “Don’t worry, Clark. I wouldn't be doing this to Blue if I didn't think the tank was functional. I tested it *extensively* on the blackfins at my disposal and it is safe.”

Clark’s eyes locked with Blue’s; the fear in them was all he could see.

Blue remained still in the centre of the tank, he was wincing, letting out grunts of pain. As he watched, Clark noticed something. He was changing; his scales grew darker, his body began to recede into itself. The muscles and fat were slowly moving to his core, only to liquify into his chest cavity, leaving an almost skeletal body in its wake. That was to say nothing of his face. His nose had withdrawn into his skull, his cheeks were pulled back, showing the two rows of teeth clearly. The lids of his eyes pulled back, no longer able to shut. Even the whites of them began to disappear, with the black pupil growing until it covered the surface entirely. In the dim, red light of the room, the shimmering surface of his skin was all the more brighter and as Elijah stared, Clark could have sworn he saw tears in his eyes.

That was indeed the case as he brought his hands up and wiped his face. “My God… He’s even more beautiful than I imagined…” he muttered. He walked up to the tank, but this time Blue didn’t swipe or attack. He remained still, only lifting his head to look at Elijah, and then, slowly, he turned those blank eyes onto Clark.

‘Can you hear me now?’

Clark convulsed at the sensation. The voice was familiar, but filled with static that felt as though it was bundling up Clark’s mind. “*What*-- ”

Bruce shook his head sharply. ‘Don’t talk. Use the sync. Slade is early inside, you need to keep Elijah occupied until he gets here.’ Bruce pressed his hands against the glass. ‘Do you understand?’

Another stab of pain. Clark opened his mouth to respond but quickly shut it again. ‘*Yes* .’

Elijah was walking around the tank and when he was back in front of him, Clark summoned up every scrap of energy he had to speak. “How… Did you… Find out…?” He rasped.

It took a moment for Hadal to respond, taken as he was by Bruce, but when he did, he looked at Clark as though he had forgotten he was there entirely. “Find out what?” He asked, tilting his head.

“About… Me…”

“Oh, that.” Hadal remarked. “I found out when my contact informed me of the supposed blackfin you’d taken from him. You see, I won’t lie, I was very eager to get my hands on it. I had hoped you’d sell him to me, but when that didn’t work I must have made my eagerness quite apparent to my contact as one day I received an interesting fax from him. It informed me that all attempts to get the blackfin from you wouldn’t work on account of you being ‘Superman’.”

Clark grimaced. Suddenly, he didn't feel as bad about Antonio's death. In fact, a small part of him wished he could have been there to see it.

"I will say, that revelation shocked me. For one, I, and I'm sure the rest of the planet, assumed Superman left Earth after Metropolis fell. Hearing that you were still here, and what's more, were living with a mer was just too much for me to believe. I thought my contact was lying, but I always live by the motto, 'better safe than sorry' and I decided to prepare just in case he was telling the truth. After asking around, I managed to arrange a meeting with a man I was dying to speak to and once I had made him an offer he couldn't say no to, he gave me what I wanted."

Clark closed his eyes and let out a shallow breath. "*Luthor* ."

Hadal nodded. "Indeed. He was dubious at first. After all, he thought you were either dead or off planet as well. But after some persuasion and the limited proof I had, he gave me a small amount of Kryptonite. He also informed me as to the effect of red sunlight on you and after that, it didn't take me long to outfit my labs with the lamps. The main issue I now had was with the Kryptonite. I only had a small amount, not nearly enough to outfit all of my labs with pressurized ejectors such as the one I used today. So I made the decision to keep it secured within my main lab until the time was right."

He slowly walked towards him. "But there was still that worry. The worry that my contact was lying and I would look like a fool upon flooding the room with red sun rays and hitting you with a rock, only for you to simply hit me. It was then that I knew I had to test it out for myself."

"The… syringe…"

"Exactly. I figured if you *were* human, it would go in easily and I would take Blue that way. But if it didn't, well then I knew for certain you were Superman. Once the test was done, I was willing to wait months for you to come back. I knew you'd have to eventually; either when the morphine ran out, or when Blue gave birth, but I knew you'd have to come back sooner or later." He gave a short laugh. "The next day was rather startling, I must admit. I had to rush back to my lab to retrieve the Kryptonite and had barely managed to finish equipping the ejector with it by the time you arrived, but given who you were bringing with you this time. I knew I couldn't let you go again."

Clark frowned. "You know… about…?"

“Deathstroke?” Hadal asked, tilting his head. “Oh, I am very well aware of Mr. Wilson. You see, he’s not the only one who fits listening devices.” He lifted his hand, holding aloft a small metal disk.

Clark’s eyes blew wide when he recognized it. It was the one Slade had slid under his collar. Hadal turned it in his hand, examining the metal surface as he did. “Sloppy work, if you ask me. My devices at least are built *into* things. Not just tucked behind a collar. Much harder to find.” He sent Clark a knowing smile, and Clark's frown only worsened.

He closed his eyes, wondering how he could have been so blind. “The… cooler…”

“Precisely.” Hadal said as he slid the disk into his pocket. “I had it fitted with a microphone in order to listen in on you. I hadn’t expected to learn much from it, but to find out that you are in cahoots with Deathstroke, was a nice tidbit. Just means I now get to kill two birds with one stone.” He shook his head, his smile remaining strong. “He’s not getting inside this submarine. You understand that, right?”

“You seem… Awfully confident.”

“We’re currently two thousand feet below the surface. No human can survive those depths. Even in scuba gear.” Hadal brought his hands together. “Now then. I need to make a few phone calls. Someone I know is offering *quite* a bit of money for a soon to be dead Kryptonian.” Hadal crooned, but just as soon as that sickly sweet smile grew on his face it quickly disappeared at the sound of a claxon. He looked around and quickly brought his watch to his mouth. “Computer, what is happening?”

There was a rumble from the submarine as it lurched, and Hadal’s eyes blew wide as he stumbled. A quiet beep came from his watch and then a voice spoke. “*Breach detected in the escape trunk. Flooding in upper levels.”*

Hadal frowned. “Initiate emergency protocol.”

“*Flood prevention protocol not found. Data loss detected*.” Another alarm sounded. “*Intruders in upper levels* .”

Hadal’s eyes briefly flicked to Clark. “Initiate security protocol.”

“*Security protocol not found. Data loss detected* .”

A sharp sigh. “Initiate--”

But before he could finish, there was another alarm . *“Intruders detected in the cockpit. Intruder detected near lab. Submarine now rising.* ”

Hadal bit his lip. “Lower us back down. *Now* ."

“*Sorry asshole, this is my sub now* .” Came Grant’s voice, feigning the computer's mechanical twang.

Hadal stilled and despite what Clark thought he might do, he actually laughed. “That *bastard.* ”

“Now is that anyway to speak to an old friend.” Came a voice and Clark could have wept when he heard it.

“Mr. Wilson.” Hadal said as he slowly turned to the doorway. “What a pleasure.”

Slade walked into the room, his head briefly turning to Clark as he did. ‘~~Jesus, he looks like shit~~.’ He pointed his gun up at Elijah, cocking it. “I would ask how you're doing Hadal but I'd rather just shoot you.”

“Please, you’re not going to kill me.” Hadal said, crossing his arms. “You said so yourself.”

Slade shook his head. “No, you’re right. I’m not going to *kill* you. But torture, maiming and waterboarding are still on the table.” ‘~~Are you hurt?~~[2]

Bruce pressed himself against the glass of the tank. ‘~~No, but Clark is. Please, Slade. You need to~~

Slade grimaced. ‘Look, you're going to have to bare with me. I'll help Clark in a minute. Right after I deal with this son of a bitch.’

Clark let out a low groan at the voices he was hearing. They pounded against his skull with their intensity and he was sure at any moment they would cause him to pass out again.

“I don’t much like the sound of those options.” Hadal said evenly.

“Well, that’s the great thing about them, doc. I stop doing them when I get what I want.”

“I don’t plan on giving you what you want, though.”

“So death it is.” Slade said as he waved his gun. “You have to understand something. Whilst any info you have will be useful and would of course lead to a far less painful death, I don't *need* it.”

“Oh, but you do.” Hadal said with a slow nod. “You want this ‘Tim’ back, don’t you?”

Slade’s hand twitched. “Where is he?” He ground out, stepping forward. “Tell me now or I *will* shoot out your knee caps.”

Hadal gave an exaggerated frown. “Now don’t do that, Slade. We would hate for ‘Tim’ to die before you’ve even had the opportunity to at least *try* and save him.”

Slade took a deep breath. “Three. Two. One--”

“I really wouldn’t do that.” Hadal said and despite his posturing he did step back. “I am warning you, hurting me will lead to a whole lot more death.”

“What the Hell are you talking about?”

“After the last time we met, I realized something.” Hadal brought his hands behind his back, clasping them. He rocked onto his heels as he spoke. “That you, as well as quite a few other individuals want nothing more than to see me dead. I knew I needed to make a failsafe; something that should my life be threatened, I could use to prevent my death. The following mer auction, I unveiled that failsafe. The ‘iron lung’ 2.0. Equipped with remote controls, wifi enabled and most importantly, now capable of doing the very thing it was created to negate.”

Slowly, Hadal’s smile grew. “I made it so that if I died, every iron lung on the planet would stop working. The artificial gills close, and the nanotubing constricts, clamping down on the mers neck and suffocating them. I’m also sure you’re aware of how difficult iron gills are remove with the proper tools at the best of times. But when they’re constricted? They’re even *harder* to remove.”

Despite the mask obscuring his face, Clark could feel the uncertainty rolling of Slade in droves. ‘~~He//has to be bluffing... he//has to be.~~’

“I know you probably think I'm bluffing, but that’s the wonderful thing about this Mr. Wilson. You can't prove that I'm not without risking *every* mer in captivity.” Hadal looked around the lab. “I used the same system in all my labs. If I die, the labs will either detonate or submerge to their crushing depth. Even if you have control of the sub, the subsystems in place that cause this to happen are impossible to find even for the most dutiful of hackers. Meaning all power in this lab will be lost and you might think you can escape before you’re crushed to death, but that’s the interesting thing about this tank.” He said as he set his hand on the glass surface. “Without power. The pressurisation stops and our precious ‘Bruce’ explodes.”

Even without the super hearing, Clark could hear Slade swallow. “You’re bluffing. There is no way that you--”

“That I what?” Hadal asked, tilting his head. “Did all that work?” He huffed a laugh. “I outfitted my labs with red sun lamps and acquired Kryptonite on the *off chance* that my contact was being serious when he told me Clark was Superman, and yet you still seem to think I wouldn't go to the same lengths to ensure *I* remain alive no matter what threat comes knocking at my door?” He sighed. “No, Mr. Wilson, I can assure you, I am not bluffing.”

Clark watched the man intently, and then in almost an instant, Slade's entire body deflated as he lowered his arm. “What do you want?” He muttered.

“I thought that was fairly obvious.”

“I don’t want to kill you, but I will if you leave me no choice. Sure, mers will die, sure *we* will all die, but once you’re gone the world--”

“Will carry on as it always has.” Hadal said simply. “With auctions continuing to take place and some other passionate scientist ready to assume my role. You will solve *nothing* by killing me. No matter what you try to tell yourself.”

"Then I won't let you die, I'll just torture you till you *beg* for death."

"I have ways to end my own life. Ways that you can not prepare for nor prevent."

Slade let out a harsh breath as he brought the gun back up. “Give me Bruce back. *Now* .”

Hadal didn’t so much as blink. “No.”

‘~~I don't see any other choice...~~’

Slade closed his eyes. “Alright, Hadal. You win.”

Hadal gave a languid smile. “I’m glad you finally understand the situation you're in.”

Slade titled his head. “I’m just sorry it had to happen like this. I *really* wanted to torture you. Break your legs. Cut off your fingers. Feed them to you. You know how it is.”

“Oh, I do indeed.” Hadal nodded.

“Then, when you were barely clinging onto life. You know what I'd have done?” Slade shook his head. “I’d have thrown you to the sharks.”

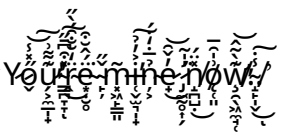
Hadal smiled. “Poetic.”

But just as Slade slide the gun back into his holster, his static filled voiced filled Clark’s mind.

‘~~Jericho.~~ ~~*Now.*~~’

A bright flash of light assaulted Clark's vision and by the time he blinked through it, there was another body in the room, clad in similar armour to Slade’s.

He rolled across the floor till he was in front of a still blinking Hadal.

Then he shot up, ripping the mask from his face. ‘  ’

Then, the man slumped to the floor. Falling with loud thud. The voice he had heard, caused Clark to yelp in pain, but just as soon as he had felt it, the pain left, leaving Clark to stare intently the body on the floor. He regonised that mop of blond curls. *Joey*.

Just as he finished taking the sight in, he looked up at Elijah. The man blinked a few times, then smiled. “Sorry we were late.”

“Alright, *now* I can focus on the idiot.” Slade said as he ripped off his own mask and crouched down beside Clark, reaching for his belt and opening it. “Was it really that hard to keep Bruce safe and *not* die? Seriously, the fact that you failed at *both* is just--” the rest of those words were lost as Slade grumbled to himself. Clark however was still very confused as to what was happening.

“What… happened… to Joey…” he managed to ask, and when he did, Elijah approached, peering over Slade's shoulder as he pulled out what was in his belt. Tweezers.

“I’m fine. I’m just in here for the moment.” Elijah said as he looked down at his body, wiping down the front of his coat with his hands. “He feels awful, by the way.”

“Well, I’m sorry but you’re in there until we figure out what the Hell to do about his fucking *failsafes*.”

“You’re… *in* him?” Clark asked, letting out a quiet gasp as Slade began removing the small pieces of Kryptonite from his chest.

“Jericho can do that.” Slade said as he plucked out a piece of Kryptonite and placed it into another compartment of his belt. “Ever since he was a kid. We think it has to do with his sync. It’s… different.”

Clark took a breath, and this time, it wasn’t grimace inducing. Slade removed another small chunk. “Different?”

“It’s stronger. It can overwhelm humans easily and when he does it, he goes *inside* of them. We still don’t know the mechanics of it, but all I do know is that it can be *very* useful. Issue is, I didn’t want him to use it on Hadal just in case he was a mernan, but we'd run out of options and I didn’t know what else to do, so.” Slade shrugged a shoulder. “But it looks like he was human, so that’s something at least.”

“What if… he hadn't been human?”

“Then *you’d* be dead.” Slade said, using his tweezers to poke Clark in the stomach. “Though the jury is still out as to whether or not you’ll still live. Honestly with what I am seeing, I'm surprised you're even awake.”

“I wasn’t.” Clark said slowly. “I woke up. Something… woke me up.”

It was hazy in Clark’s mind, but when he probed deeper he was met with the memory of water and--

“Bruce.” Clark said as he turned to the mer. “Bruce woke me up.”

Slade offered a wry smile at that. “How loud did you have to scream to manage that, B?”

‘I didn’t.’ Bruce said, tilting his head. ‘I synced with him.’

“You--” but Slade's smile left him. His brows furrowed together as he turned to the mer in the tank. “But… *how* ?”

‘He’s easier to communicate with when asleep. As for why it’s working right now...’ And despite the altered facial features, Clark could see a raised eyebrow when he saw one. ‘Look at me.’

“Yeah, I wasn’t gonna say anything, but Jesus, at that depth you are something else.” Slade actually shuddered. “How many atmospheres are you at?”

Bruce looked down at his hands; twisting them before his eyes as though poring over the near translucent skin there. ‘If I had to guess, somewhere around eight hundred.’

“*Jesus* .” Slade muttered as he went back to work, plucking out another chunk. “Hadal was right about one thing, then. We try to break you out of that, you become *pâté* .”

Bruce nodded. ‘I would appreciate you *not* doing that.’

Slade jerked his head to the side. “Jericho, you wanna take a look at the controls? See if you can understand them. Maybe there is a way to depressurize the tank.”

Joey walked away and approached the control panel. He didn’t bring his hands up, simply leaning in close and eyeing the buttons and switches. After a moment, he turned back to Slade. “I don’t understand any of it.”

“Great.” Slade said, pressing his lips together. “Well, Hadal must have something written down. We’ll get you out of there, Bruce. Don’t worry.”

‘~~I can manage. What I am more worried about is Tim~~.’

“We’ll figure that out, too.” Slade said easily.

“How?” Clark asked. “You think… he’ll have that written down, too?”

He heard a snort of laughter come from the control panel, and if Slade's eye was capable of shooting lasers, Clark was certain the look he received would have caused one to lance his skull. “I’m sorry. Do you want to pull these chunks of Kryptonite out yourself?”

“Sorry.” Clark muttered.

“That’s what I thought…” Slade muttered. ‘ ~~*Smart ass../*~~’

As Slade worked, the pain in his body lessened considerably until eventually all that he felt was a constant burn across the skin there. He took a few breaths and looked down at Slade, packing away his tweezers and putting the lid on the container containing the scraps of Kryptonite. With it sealed, the pain faded even more but it only caused Clark to now turn his attention upward. “Can we do anything about those?” He asked, his voice still hoarse as he pointed to the lamps.

Slade took a moment to respond, still distracted by returning the tweezers to his belt. When he finally did look up, he quickly noticed what Clark was pointing at and let out a quiet, “oh, right.” He brought his hand to his ear and pressed the receiver there. “Ravager. Cut the lamps.”

A tinny voice could be heard from Slade's ear. “*On it*.”

Only a few seconds after that, the lights changed. It wasn’t the same as sunlight, but the fact he didn’t have the red bearing down on him anymore allowed Clark to finally breathe easy. He wanted to get up and try to get some actual sunlight, but doubted his legs were strong enough just yet. He instead turned his attention to Slade and Joey, who were now standing around the control panel as Bruce remained nearby. “So what’s the plan?”

“We’re gonna go look around Hadal’s office. He should have something in there that we can use, and if not, then Jericho might need to do a little reconnaissance as the man himself.”

“I hope I don’t have to. I really am not lying when I tell you being in him is like sitting in a vat of expired gravy.” Joey muttered. It was still strange to see Elijah's face moving in a way that was so uncharacteristically Elijah yet clearly was. He didn't know if he'd ever get used to it.

Slade ignored the comment as he turned towards Clark. “You feeling well enough to help, Clark, or do you need to sit a while longer?”

“I need to get some sunlight, ideally. Are we at the surface?”

“Yeah, we had to blow the ballast as soon as we could after piercing the hull at the escape trunk. If we hadn’t, well…” he pressed his lips together. “We'd be neck deep in water right now.”

Clark shook his head at that. “How did you even manage that? Hadal said--”

“He said that no *human* can go down below two thousand feet.” Slade said as he raised a brow at Clark. "Did you forget we're not human, or...?"

“Ah, right.” Clark said with a bob of the head, his cheeks growing warm. “Well, with that I think I better--” but as Clark tried to stand, his legs were indeed too weak to support his body and he nearly crumbled to the floor then and there.

Thankfully, he was still near the chair and managed to catch himself before he made a complete fool out of himself.

‘~~Clark!~~’ came Bruce’s voice, and Clark tried to send him an easy smile though it came across more like a grimace.

“I’m fine B, just a little weak still.” He tried to stand again, and this time managed to get onto his feet. Whether or not he’d be able to move was another question entirely but at least he was standing.

Slade must have noticed his predicament as he heaved a sigh. “I'll take you to the hatch, I need to smoke anyway.” He turned to joey. “Keep an eye on Bruce, I don’t want him alone whilst he’s in the tank.” He brought his hand up to his ear again. “And Ravager, once you’ve transferred control of the sub to Wintergreen I want you down here helping us go through Hadal’s office. He must have something we can use in there.”

“Understood.” Came Grant and Joey’s near synchronized response.

“Alright, Superman, let's go get you powered up.” Slade approached him and easily slipped under Clark’s arm, taking his weight easily as he did. They began to walk, and whilst Clark stumbled a few times, the more he moved, the more his body seemed to remember *how* to move.

By the time they were in the corridor leading to the entrance hatch, Clark was moving nearly of his own accord, though he continued holding onto Slade just in case his legs chose to fail him.

Once at the hatch, Slade left him propped up against the wall as he worked the panel. After a few button presses, the door opened, flooding the room with bright sunlight. The moment it hit Clark he took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He felt better already.

“Jesus.” He heard Slade mutter. “That’s crazy.”

“What is?” Clark asked, cracking open an eye.

“You’re chest.” Was all he said.

Clark looked down at himself, and saw what he had to assume Slade was referring to. The divots and cuts there, both deep and minor, were beginning to close, leaving only a dark maroon stain of dried blood in their wake. Clark however, didn’t see this as anything out of the ordinary and shrugged. “Yeah, I can sort of do that.”

Slade reached into his pocket and pulled out his cigarettes. “At least you're humble about it…” He muttered.

After lighting the cigarette and taking a drag, Slade turned his attention outside the door to the open water. Clark followed suit, staring at the pristine water as he basked in the warmth. His boat had moved. Most likely displaced during the lowering and subsequent raising of the sub. Clark however was just happy it still looked like it was in one piece. He turned to Slade. “Thank you for saving me.” He said.

Slade for the most part looked unbothered by the words, only offering a shrug. “Don’t mention it.”

Clark did just that, turning his attention back to the water. “You really think Hadal will have everything we need written down somewhere?”

Slade huffed a breath, sending smoke towards Clark. “No, but I'm not going to tell Bruce that, am I?”

“I think he’d appreciate the honesty, rather than the false hope.”

“It's not *false* .” Slade snapped, and Clark was surprised by the anger there. “Hadal will have something. It might not be everything. But he will have *something*.”

At the mention of that word, Clark gave a thoughtful nod. “He was writing in a book when he was looking over Bruce yesterday.”

Slade gestured with his cigarette. “There we go. If he writes down that sort of shit, he’s gonna have to write down how that tank works. I’m sure of it.”

“What about Tim?”

Slade inhaled sharply, blowing the smoke out just as quickly. “We’ll find him.”

Clark turned his attention back outside. “We should let Selina know what’s going on. She’d want to know.”

Slade nodded. “Already have. Wintergreen's told her what happened.”

“Who is Wintergreen?” Clark asked, raising a brow. “Please don’t tell me he’s another son of yours.”

“Oh, no. Old friend and colleague. I’ve known him for years. Half of my intel comes from him. Once Ravager’s finished transferring remote controls to Wintergreen, he’s gonna start poring through the data in Hadal's computer.”

“And if he finds nothing?”

Slade frowned, his jaw twitching. “Can you *not* keep asking me what will happen if things go wrong? There are only so many ways I can say the words ‘someone will die’ before I might as well record it on a cassette and hand it to you to play whenever that dumbass question leaves your lips.”

“Sorry, I just…” Clark took a deep breath. “I’m worried about B.”

“So am I.” Slade said, the anger from his face disappearing, leaving only resignation. “But whilst in that form, his body uses less calories so in the worst of worst case scenarios, he can survive over a month in that tank without food.”

Something about those words caught Clark. “That form?” He asked.

“Yeah, his abyssal form.”

Clark however only grew more confused. “I’m sorry, am I missing something here.”

That caught Slade who only raised a brow. “Maybe you are.”

“You’re making it sound like Blue has changed or something.”

Slade narrowed his eye. “Because he *did*.”

Clark's eyes blew wide. “When?”

“What do you mean *when* ?” Slade said as he threw the now finished cigarette out the open doorway and whirled on Clark. “I’m sorry, did you just forget everything that just happened or are you just that dumb?”

“What, I--” but Clark's mouth clamped shut. As he tried to go back to the moment they had left the lab, he found the memory was patchy. He remembers Hadal, Slade coming in. He remembers Slade picking Kryptonite out of his chest. But what he doesn’t remember is Bruce. He knew he must have been there. After all, he remembers seeing him in the tank when he had awoken, and could hear Hadal and Slade referring to him. He *must* have been there, and yet. “I don’t remember.” Clark said blankly.

“You--” but what started as a haughty response from Slade quickly dissolved into sympathy as he began the sentence again. “You really don’t remember?”

“No.” Clark said, racking his brain. He hoped for a different answer the second time around, but if anything, the memories grew more patchy, with entire moments devolving into snapshots. “What the Hell… why can’t I--”

“No, no.” Slade said, coming to him and reaching for his shoulders and holding him steady. Something about the touch helped and Clark stared into that single silver eye. “I’m remembering now. This is normal. Your brain can’t process the sync properly. When you’re near Bruce, his proxy sync is what allows you to remember and understand the information from the sync, but now you’re out of range of him, the memories and ability to sync are going right along with it.”

“What the Hell…" Clark muttered, reaching up to take Slade's hands off of him, but instead, simply rested them on top. “That sounds--”

“Crazy, I know.” Slade nodded. “But you’re fucking an abysall fin, Clark. ‘Crazy’ is sort of their whole bag.”

All of a sudden, Clark's concern melted leaving only mild exasperation. “God damn it, Slade...”

“What?”

“Can you *not* be crude, for like, five minutes, at least!”

“Hey, I waited until you weren’t dying.” Slade ground out, crossing his arms. “That’s longer than usual.”

“Next time wait until I am *dead* .”

Slade rolled his eye. “Well, i’m sorry, ‘*Mr. southern belle*’, I will try to be more polite so as to not upset your delicate sensibilities in the future!”

“That’s it, I'm going back down.” Clark said, already turning and threading back down stairs.

He had hoped Slade would stay up there for a little longer, but no, he heard his loud footsteps following after him as they both made their way down.

Once they were back at the lab, they found Joey sitting next to the tank with Bruce lounging around inside of it. The moment Clark saw him, he felt his mind come alive. “Oh right, the different form.”

Bruce lifted his head up at the words. ‘~~Is it coming back to you?~~[2] He asked.

“Yeah, yeah it is.” As he said that, Slade came up behind and then walked past Clark towards Joey. “Are you still doing okay in there, B?”

‘~~I’m coping. Just trying to keep calm, mostly.~~’

Clark walked up to the tank, raising his hand. “We’ll get you out in no time.”

“Yeah, no we won’t.” Came Grant's voice as he walked in, holding a book in his hands.

Slade whirled on him, his anger palpable. “*Why* are you saying that?” Slade asked under his breath, perhaps assuming Bruce wouldn’t hear. Sadly, the damage had already been done, as Bruce was now sitting up right, his hands pressed once more onto the glass as worry consumed his face.

“His journal, it’s all written in some sort of code.” Grant said as he showed the book to Slade. When he did, Clark caught sight of the page. It was a jumble of letters, numbers and symbols. “It’s not in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Hell, not even *Latin* .” Grant lowered the book. “All his books are like this.”

“Okay.” Slade said, and despite the news his voice remained remarkably even. “We still have his computer. Wintergreen is--”

“Trying to sort through the terabytes of data on Hadal’s mainframe.” Grant sighed. “Look dad, I think we’re going to have to interrogate Hadal. If we restrain him, he can’t kill himself. We can keep his heart going with adrenaline, we can--”

“*No*.” Slade snapped, and Grant immediately stopped speaking, his mouth snapping shut. “We don’t know *what* his failsafes are. It could be a code he has to put in every day before he sleeps, it could be a heart rate monitor, it could be both, it could be neither. We. Don’t. *Know*. We can't risk it.”

“If only I could read his mind.” Joey said more to himself as he brought his legs up and hugged them. “Then we’d know…”

The mood that took over the room was sombre. Grant went back to reading the journal, perhaps hoping to find something hidden in the pages. Slade approached the tank, resting his hand on top of Bruce's as they synced with one another, and finally Joey remained where he was on the floor, staring at his own feet. Clark watched him, his words repeating in his mind, until he opened his mouth. "Would that be helpful?" He asked.

"Would what be helpful?" Slade asked, turning his head yet keeping his hand where it was over Bruce's.

"If we could read Hadal's mind, would that be helpful?"

Slade rolled his eyes. "Obviously it would be, but Joey can't do it. He can possess people, but he can't read their minds."

Clark grew pensive. A tentative idea forming in his mind. "What if I knew someone who could read minds?"

Slade made a face. "You're not going to tell me telepathy is another one of your powers, are you?"

Clark shook his head. "It isn't, but, when I was in the Justice League, I knew a man who could do it."

"Right, your 'League of Super Friends'." Slade replied. "You still speak to any of them?"

Clark winced. He thought of Diana, of the last words they had shared. "Not for a while, no."

"And yet you seem to think we can go and ask them to help us."

Clark looked down at himself. "That's the thing. I don't know that." He took a deep breath. "But it's better than just sitting here whilst we hope for Hadal's cipher to fall from the sky. If we can get into his mind, we can figure out the cipher, we can find out where his labs are and how to work the tank. If you have a better idea, Slade, believe me I am all ears."

He held Slade's stare for a while, but perhaps because there truly were no other options, that staring match didn't last for long. Instead, Slade began to nod. "Alright, Clark. Go find your Super Friends. Just make sure they understand what's at stake if they don't help."

"I will." Clark said, before turning to the tank and placing his own hand there. '~~I'll be right back, B.~~'

'~~Stay safe.~~' Bruce said, pressing his forehead to the glass. '~~*Please*~~.'

Despite the audience, Clark came forward and pressed his lips to the glass. In his mind, it felt like a romantic gesture, but as the cold glass hit his lips and he opened his eyes to see Bruce's forlorn ones watching him, he felt only profound loneliness wash over him. Bruce was right there before him, but he might as well have been on another planet for how distant he felt.

"We'll keep an eye on him." Slade said, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry."

Clark only nodded and after saying his goodbyes he made his way back towards the hatchway. When he looked up at the clear blue sky, he thought of the Justice League headquarters, of how best to get into it. It had been years since he had gone there. Would he even be recognised by the computers? Or would he be attacked on sight?

Only one way to find out. He thought as he took flight.

Chapter End Notes

Wooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo! Happy New Year everyone!

I won't lie, I am weirdly proud of this chapter. The beginning especially. It was a lot of fun to work with the medium of text to create interesting visuals, and I hope you all can appreciate what I was going for by doing it. I just hope the it works okay for people on mobile, as I formatted it for desktops.

As for this chapter, I will say Hadal is genuinely a joy to write. Mad scientist's are just a vibe, to be honest. Also, before anyone jumps at me for inaccurate science terms, bare in mind, I am a creative arts student whose knowledge of marine biology comes form Wikipedia and documentaries. If it's inaccurate, I am just going to say that it was intentional XD

But yes, Hadal is under control for the time being, but Bruce is trapped, and Tim is still missing. Is he safe? Will Clark be able to get the help he needs? Or will he be turned away? Tune in next time to find out ;)

As always let me know your thoughts. Your kind words are what keep me going!

I hope you all had a lovely New Years. Here is to 2022!

Chapter 36

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clark couldn't really describe the emotion he was feeling.

As he stared at the structure before him, the first thing that hit him was trepidation. He hadn't been here in over four years, and the idea that he would be attacked on sight by the Watchtower's security systems was looming large in his mind.

Aside from that though, he also felt a touch of relief. Something about the familiarity of this place soothed some long thought dead part of himself. Before Metropolis, this had been his home away from home for a number of years, the other members of the League had become his second family. He only had fond memories of this place, even during times of hardship, what shone through in Clark's memories was how the League had been there for him. How he used to be there for them.

That was of course before he burnt every bridge he had.

Hence why the small smidge of relief he felt was soon trumped by overwhelming guilt. He thought of Diana, of the look on her face the last time they had spoken. He had hurt her and he would not be surprised if that transgression was made evident to all of his former teammates and he would be kicked right back on out the door for even trying to come back. *Superman has officially jumped off the deep end,* Diana would have said, *He is sleeping with the fishes, and no that is not euphemism. I mean it literally.*

He reasoned that this was different. He wasn't coming to try and slot back into a well oiled machine that had long since moved past needing him. He was coming for help. He *needed* their help and wasn't leaving until he got it.

He just had to build up the courage to go inside and actually ask for it.

That courage took a little over five minutes to accumulate, but when it did, he flew up to the airlock and pressed his old ID code into it. He still remembered the master one; Ollie had informed him of it during the Watchtower's construction, and yet he still typed his own into the console. Why? He didn't

really know, though he eventually settled on it being morbid curiosity. He simply wanted to see if it would still work.

The light on the pad flashed amber for a long while; longer than usual, until it suddenly turned green, with the words 'RECOGNISED. SUPERMAN. WELCOME BACK,' appearing on the screen. Clark didn't have time to unpack and go into why, but his eyes began to water as he stared down at the words. He really had thought his name would have been scrubbed from the system long ago.

The airlock doors slid open and after floating inside, he started the pressurization procedures. It took a few moments for the oxygen to flood the chamber, but once it was done, the doors in front of him slid open, revealing the sleek interior of the station.

It looked as though there had been a major refit since the last time he was here. In his day, the place was all gunmetal greys with clunky machinery. Now, it was far brighter, with whites and silvers, as well as screens that hung on the walls, with nary a wire in sight.

The temptation to explore the place was there, but then the sound of voices soon hit his ears and he stilled. He had expected people to be here of course. After all, that was *why* he was here. He just wasn't prepared for the *amount* of voices he was hearing.

He also knew they'd most likely be blissfully unaware of his presence. He could hear no alarms going off, no 'Superman is inside, get the Kryptonite' blaring on the PA. There was no indication that anyone inside knew he was here. He could walk back out again if he wanted to.

He wasn't going to, but he could.

After what felt like several minutes, he managed to coerce his legs into moving and he began to move towards the voices. From what he remembered of the layout, they were in a meeting room, which only made Clark's desire to retreat grow. He could handle interrupting a casual conversation, but interrupting a meeting was another thing entirely.

Still, he didn't have any other choice and so it was with a grim frown that he stepped into the meeting room and after a quick scan counted over nine of his former colleagues.

Great.

It took a few minutes for them to notice him. Of course the first was J'onn. Who's eyes slid to him the very moment he appeared in the doorway. J'onn's expression was difficult to read, given it didn't shift one muscle from watching Diana speaking to now staring at Clark. Yet, perhaps because of how well he remembered the Martian's face, he could have sworn he felt the warmth of a smile in that seemingly blank expression.

Then there was Victor. He was staring at his arm when Clark had entered, a red light flashing there. After pressing a few buttons, it turned green. He quickly eyed Clark and sent him what Clark starkly realized was a wink.

Next to notice him was Kon, who then promptly hit Kara in the shoulder. Clark was surprised to see them here, but it dawned on Clark that he hadn't seen them in over four years, and really, a lot must have happened in that time.

Dinah was facing away from the doorway, sat beside Ollie, and despite paying attention to Diana, she must have noticed Kara's wide eyes as well as Kon's and turned her head towards the door to see what they were looking at. Her mouth fell open the moment she clocked him and she hit Ollie, who muttered a quiet swear before turning toward the door to join the staring.

Barry and Hal were next, spying him in near unison and offering a quiet gasp as their response.

Clark really expected someone to stop Diana from talking given not a single person was paying attention anymore, but no, they all just remained gawping quietly at him as Diana remained blissfully unaware. He didn't want to interrupt her either, but doubted she'd appreciate speaking to a now preoccupied audience for any longer. So, he raised his fist to his mouth and offered a quiet cough.

That did the trick. Diana looked up from her screen and after seeing where all of her teammates stares were directed, she too turned her head, spotting Clark and offering her own gasp.

He hadn't actually given much thought to how he'd actually greet everyone. He knew why he was here, what he needed to say, but as far as *how* he was going to get the ball rolling, that was still up in the air. He took in everyone's face, seeing the mix of relief, confusion, pity and of course, anger, there.

The latter was only from one.

“How did you get in here?” Diana asked, a frown having replaced her look of surprise. She stepped away from the table, slowly walking towards him. “You do not have clearance anymore.”

Clark made a face, gesturing back the way he came. “Clearly I do. I got in through the front door.”

Diana made a face, letting out a sharp sigh as she turned sharply. “*Victor* .”

The man in question only held up his hands. “Hey, I *did* take him off, I just…” Victor shrugged, “put him back on again.”

“Well, great.” Diana said, whirling back on Clark. “You have got some nerve coming back here.” She held up her hand, pointing a finger right into his face. “If you think we are just going to welcome you back like nothing happened, that is not going to happen.”

“Yeah, we’re gonna hug you, *then* welcome you back like nothing happened.” Came Kara's voice as she got up from the table and flew towards him in a flash of movement. Clark held up his hands instinctively, but quickly lowered them upon feeling Kara's arms wrap around him. He hugged her back, bringing one hand up to pet her hair.

“Oh, no no.” Diana said, setting her hands on his hips and appearing all the more like a scolding parent. “Kara, step away from Clark. *Now.* ”

Even Clark grimaced at the tone, and he wasn’t exactly surprised when Kara stepped away from him, her head hung low. “Come on, Diana. I’ve not seen him for *years* .”

“Because he did not want to be *seen* .” Diana said, narrowing her eyes at him. “He lost the privilege to come here when he burnt *every* bridge he had.”

Clark winced at the words; the sting wholly coming from the truth in them. He didn’t want to be seen by his teammates, to see their pity, and in doing so he destroyed every friendship he had once held dear.

Including the one that he had taken for granted.

“Diana, I…” he bit his lip, trying to find the words he wanted to say from the disaster zone that was his mind right now. It was hard, but eventually he found the rest of the sentence lurking somewhere in there. “I’m so sorry for what I said to you. You were right. I only said those things because I wanted to hurt you; to make you leave me alone for good.”

He closed his eyes. “That’s because seeing you just reminded me of what I used to be. I’m not Superman anymore. I’m just Clark. Clark Kent, widower, and I just wanted to wallow in that. But I know I need to stop. I *want* to be better, I want to get better, and whilst I wish I could say I came her for that reason, the truth is I came here because I need your help, and I know you have every reason to turn me away, but I need you to understand that the man I love will die if you don’t.”

“Whoa. Clark’s gay?” Hal asked before everyone in the room turned to him, glaring. “Okay, bad time to ask, sorry.” He cleared his throat. “Continue Clark.”

Clark pressed his lips together. “Yeah, no, that was it.”

“Oh.” Hal looked down at his tented hands. “Sorry.”

Silence enveloped the room, and aside from Barry and Dinah who were still sending death glares Hal’s way, everyone else’s attention was back on the three by the door. Kara’s eyes darted between the pair, and when Clark chanced a look at Diana he saw how her eyes were now watering. “You hurt me.” Was all she said, her voice trembling.

“I know I did." Clark said, stepping towards her. “I hated you for how kind you were to me, how after all the years of me resenting and hiding away from you that you stuck by me, how you never let me forget my birthday, how you urged me to move on because you knew that’s what Lois would want. You were the best friend I needed, and I treated you like garbage.” He held her stare even when he felt his own start to sting. “I know I will never be able to make up for what I did to you, but I want you to know that I'm willing to try.”

In the silence that followed, Clark could hear the bated breaths of his teammates, could practically hear how Kara's heart hammered as her darting eyes moved even faster between them. Then, the silence was punctured by Diana taking a deep breath. “Okay.” She whispered, wiping her face. “I forgive you.”

Clark couldn't help it, a shy smile touched his face. "Really?" He asked, not believing there wasn't a catch.

"On the condition that you see Dinah every week for therapy, renovate that hole you call a home, and either allow me to visit you regularly, or come visit me at my home regularly." She said curtly. "Those are my terms."

"There it is…" Clark said with a laugh. Then he gave a single solemn nod. "I agree to those conditions."

Diana sent him a watery smile. "Good." She said as she turned to Kara. "*Now* we can hug him."

"Yay!" Kara said brightly as she as well as Diana approached Clark, wrapping their arms around him. He heard a shuffling of chairs and before he knew it there were more bodies around him, all resting their arms wherever they could. It took everything in Clark to not burst into tears at the feeling, so he bit his lip and closed his eyes. Letting the warmth he was feeling soothe the pain he felt. This was okay, he told himself. Everything was going to be okay.

"Okay, okay…" Diana said as she let go and tried to move back though the effort was somewhat impeded by the bodies there. Eventually everyone got the hint and moved back. Well, everyone aside from Kara and Kon who remained glued to his side. Clark was left awkwardly patting the two as he looked at Diana. "Now Clark, you mentioned you were in need of help. What did you need exactly?"

"He needed me." Came J'onn's quiet voice. "He is in need of a mind reader."

"Really?" Ollie asked, turning to Clark. "No need for an archer, or a speedster, or an idiot?" He said the last one whilst pointing at Hal.

"*Hey* ." Was all Hal said to that.

"Yeah, it's true, I need a mind reader." He gestured towards the conference table. "Shall we sit or…" he looked down at the tops of Kara and Kon's heads. Even though they were older, and taller, they still only came to his chin.

“Kon. Kara. You are members of the Justice League now. Stop acting like children.”

“Again, what part of we haven't seen him in *years* are you not getting?” Kara said, still not removing herself from Clark’s side.

“Yeah, if we want to bury ourselves into Clark's blood soaked shirt that is *our* decision as adults.” Kon then lifted his head up and whispered. “About the blood. Should we be concerned, or..?”

“A little.” Was all Clark said to that, as he gestured to the table. “Come on, I'll tell you all about it.” When neither moved he cleared his throat. “At the *table*.”

That did it. Well, he likes to think that did it. Truthfully it was Diana's thunderous glare that did, and the pair slinked over to the table. As Clark approached, he counted the seats and allowed himself a small smile when he realized there was still one for him. He sat in it and once Diana sat at the head of the table, he cleared his throat and spoke.

“I don’t know how much Diana told you about the last time we spoke.” He began.

“Nothing.” Kara answered, leaning forward and resting her chin in her hands. “She was steamed when she told us all she wasn’t going to keep visiting you but she never actually said what you did. Just that you were to be removed from the Watchtower’s clearance list.”

Clark looked at Diana briefly, seeing her looking away, with a downcast face. She, and most likely J’onn were the only two who might even be slightly aware of where this conversation was going to go. “Okay. Well, the thing that caused… the bridge burning, was a lot of stuff. As already mentioned, me just being an ass was part of it--” he chanced another look at Diana, and saw a smile touching her lips now. He continued, “-- but there was more to it. You see, I sort of, maybe…” he cleared his throat, keeping his stare down towards the table. “Fell in love with a mer.” He finished barely above a whisper.

When he looked back up, he saw everyone's wide eyes were on him. He could practically feel the shock washing off them in droves, and as he tried to figure out what to say next he saw Kon begin to nod. “I can see why. Some mers are pretty hot.”

“Connor!” Diana chided.

“What?” Kon held up his hands. “I’m just saying.”

That at least did something to quell the shock as people now turned their attention to glaring at his clone. Clark cleared his throat and went on. “Right, well, anyway, after Diana left, me and the mer got closer and I don’t want to go into the mechanics of it all… but…” He bit his lip. “He’s pregnant.”

This time as he took in everyone's expressions, he eventually came to Diana’s whose eyes were blown wide. “The mer I saw… he’s… *pregnant* .”

“Yeah, like I said it’s a *lot* to get into right now, but the point is, he’s pregnant, and I need help because he’s…” Clark frowned, his mind coming up blank. “He’s…”

“Giving birth?” Kara chanced.

“No,” Clark said, shaking his head. “He’s… somewhere… and I need help, because of that.” He looked at J’onn. He needed the man, that much he knew, and yet everything else about why he was here had left him.

“He’s trapped in a tank.” J'onn said as he eyed Clark with a slow nod.

Clark however pressed his lips together. “He is?”

“How can a mer be trapped in a tank?” Kon asked. “Surely you can just smash open the tank if you can’t open it. Why do you need a mind reader for that?”

That was a good question. One that only caused Clark's confusion to grow. “Yeah, that is a point.” He rubbed his temples, hoping in vain that that might cause something to come back to him. “I really don’t know why I'm not remembering this…”

“It’s a pressurized tank. If you break the glass, his partner will die due to explosive decompression.” J’onn stated.

Clark as well as the rest of the table sent their wide eyed stares towards the Martian. “How do you know that?” Clark asked, his brows knitting together.

“I read your mind.” J’onn said. “The memories are still there. You just can’t access them currently.”

“Trippy." Kon said, eyeing Clark. “Why is that?”

“From what I can understand it has to do with him having a different brain structure to his partners. He can’t remember information he receives from him when they are not near one another, due to him being physically unable to access it without his partners help.”

Those words helped to stoke some life back into Clark's memories at least. He could remember Slade and him talking, could remember hearing similar words coming from the man's mouth. Yet the memories still had a fog enveloping them, as though they were there but only barely.

“So…” Kara said, holding her hand out. “Is that why he needs a mind reader? Because he can’t access info when he’s not near his partner--” Kara quickly shook her head. “Also, can you tell us his name so we don’t have to keep calling him your ‘partner’ like we’re in a cheap western movie?”

Clark opened his mouth to respond, but when a certain name nearly left his lips, he cleared his throat and answered. “It’s Bruce.”

“Bruce.” Kara repeated before turning to J’onn. “Okay, so is that why he needs a mind reader?”

J’onn shook his head. “The man who trapped Bruce in the tank has a complex system of failsafe's and controls in place that if not handled correctly can lead to a number of deaths. Clark and his colleagues wish for me to read the mind of this man in order to both save Bruce and the other mers he holds captive.”

“He sounds like a piece of shit.” Kon said, crossing his arms.

“He is.” Clark said. That much he could remember at least. “His name is Elijah Hadal. He’s a marine biologist who researches deep sea fins. My partner-- Bruce, he’s a deep sea fin. I remember he got put into a tank, but everything after that is hazy.”

It was surreal to pore over the memories. There were entire sections that had simply evaporated, creating a jumpy quality to it all. He remembers being in the lab with Hadal, but then the memory abruptly stops. Then he's out of the lab with Slade, only to then presumably go back with another blank space being the only memory of that.

Although he did remember needing J'onn, so that was something at least. He doesn't want to think about how Bruce and Slade would have reacted to him leaving only to return requiring a note to refer to it when he'd inevitably begin to question what the Hell he was meant to be doing.

At that, J'onn sent him a nod. “We should head to the lab. Time is of the essence.”

At the words, Diana stood. “Wait. We should come up with a plan. If as you say that there are a number of lives on the line, we should come up with a strategy.”

Clark knew there was a reason as to why that wasn’t necessary, but he simply could not voice it. Instead his mind thrummed with the half realized memory, causing him to wince in pain. J’onn looked to Diana. “Hadal is currently under possession of the vigilante known as Jericho. He is not dangerous in this current state.”

“Wait, *Jericho* ?” Ollie asked, frowning. “You’re not telling me you’re working with *Deathstroke* and his crew, are you?”

“You… you know about Deathstroke?” Clark asked cautiously

“Are you kidding?” Ollie rolled his eyes. “Half of the time I show up at a crime scene, I see signs of Deathstroke and his crew being the cause of it. Seriously Clark, he’s bad news.”

That caused Clark to frown. “He only kills people involved in the mer market. People like Hadal who torture and experiment on mers. People who buy and sell them like things.”

Ollie’s lip curled downward. “You used to be against killing; no matter the reason.”

“Yeah, then my wife died, Ollie.” Clark ground out. “A *lot* has changed since then.”

“Okay, I think things are getting heated.” Dinah said, bringing her hand to Ollie's arm and holding it there. “As J’onn has mentioned, we should head out.”

Clark shook his head at that. “I appreciate the offer Dinah, but I don't want to bring the whole Justice League out for this. Just J’onn.”

“*What* ?” Kara gasped, her hands hitting the table. “You disappear for four years and you won't even let me come with you on your first mission back with the League?”

That caused Clark’s eyes to blow wide. “Alright, let's make one thing clear. I am *not* back with the League. I’m just…”

“Desperate?” Diana deadpanned.

“Yes.” Clark said, with a sheepish smile. “And whilst I *do* appreciate the help and want to start seeing you guys more, I am *not* ready to be Superman again. Understood?”

Silence followed but it wasn’t one filled with contempt and instead understanding. Kon was the first to break it, giving a nod. “That’s fair. You’ve been through the ringer, Clark, makes sense you need time before you're ready to don the blue and red again.”

“Yeah.” Clark said, offering a small smile. “Thanks, Kon.”

“No problem.” He said, standing up. “And because of our obviously strong bond, I think it's only right that I accompany you on this mission.”

“Uh uh.” Kara said, shaking her head as she stood. “I’m his cousin. I deserve to go!”

“Clone beats cousin. Everyone knows that.”

“Oh my *God* .” Clark said, bringing his hand up to wipe his face. “You are not coming. End of discussion.”

“Yeah, Kara.” Kon said smugly.

“No.” Clark said, his eyes getting wider. “You’re not coming either. Just. *J’onn* .”

“And me.” Diana said, with a solemn nod.

“Diana…” Clark sighed, turning his eyes to her.

“Clark, I haven’t seen your partner since that unfortunate day on the beach. I want to meet him again and get to know him now that he is the barer of your children.”

“And you can, just, not today." Clark said in what he hoped was his most persuasive of voices.

It apparently was not, as Diana simply jutted her head to J’onn. “Let us leave.”

At that, J’onn rose from the table, and the two began to walk away. Clark eyed the rest of the members around him and offered a smile. “It was good seeing you guys again.”

“You too, Clark.” Dinah said with a soft smile. “Let me know when you want to book your sessions. I'll make sure I'm free.”

Clark cleared his throat at that. Painfully aware of the stares directed at him. “Will do.”

He left then, finding Diana and J'onn waiting at the Zeta tube for him. After a few moments, he heard footsteps and expecting Kon and Kara, he whirled around, a shout ready at his lips.

It quickly died when he saw who was actually walking towards them. “Victor?” He asked in confusion.

Cyborg waved to Clark, before going back to typing on his arm. “Figured I'd join you if as you say this guy has the technological equivalent of fort Knox protecting his data. J’onn will be able to get info from the source, sure, but if that takes too long and we’re running out of time, it's best I'm there to try and get what I can from his network.”

Clark’s eyebrows raised as he nodded. “Yeah, that sounds… yeah.” He smiled. “Thanks, Victor.”

“No sweat.” He said as he joined Diana and J'onn by the Zeta portal. “Let's roll.”

After taking the tube back down to earth, they then flew across the open ocean to where the sub jutted from the surface. Even though Clark flew from time to time, he couldn’t place why he was being infused with such a pleasant feeling on this particular journey. The sun was bright, sure, but there was something else, and very quickly he realized what it was. He turned to Diana, flying right alongside him, and the small smile she sent him caused his stomach to flutter. This was what he missed. This was why he felt so warm.

When they got to the door of the sub, Clark ushered the small group in and told them to head down to the lab. He didn't know why, but he felt as though they were being watched and when he cast his eyes out towards the sea, he made a face. One that quickly morphed into a frown. “I thought I had made myself clear.” He yelled, knowing full well who he was talking to would hear him despite the distance.

The two specks along the horizon looked nonchalant as they floated there. “We’re just out here flying, Clark. Nothing suspicious going on.” Kara yelled back

“Yeah, we’re just out flying, Clark.” Kon agreed.

“I swear to God--” but before he could finish the sentence, the two were hovering beside the doorway, grinning at him.

“Whoa, Clark what’s this?” Kara asked, looking around at the sub.

“This place looks crazy.” Kon nodded.

Clark thought about how much energy it would require in order to repel the two, and eventually conceded that that amount was not worth expending. He sighed, and stepped out of the doorway. “Get in. *Don’t* touch anything and *don’t* talk to anyone.”

“Touch everything and talk to everyone. Got it.” Kara said, as she flew in.

“Thanks, Clark!” Kon said as he too breezed past.

Despite the sun on his skin, Clark could feel the migraine building behind his eyes as he closed them and took a deep breath.

He went down the steps and eventually found the lab. He tried to ignore the thumping footsteps nearby as well as what sounded like something breaking and a quiet ‘oops’ coming from Kon. Instead he approached the doorway of the lab, and slowly, the fog lifted in his mind. Inside, he found Joey as Hadal off to the side, pouring through books as though oblivious to the literal Superheroes behind him. As for said Superheroes. He found them standing before the tank, staring at Bruce.

“He looks… well…” Diana said, her eyes wide and unblinking.

“Yeah, Clark, he is… definitely a catch.” Victor said with a nod.

Before he was able to respond, he felt two bodies push up behind him, one going as far as to bump him into the lab and out of the doorway. Once Clark was out of the way, Kara and Kon looked around the lab. “So is Bruce in here?” Kara asked, before her eyes caught who was in the tank before her. Almost immediately her arms curled around her body as she flinched back. “What the Hell is that?!”

Clark heaved a sigh as he approached the group. Kon for the most part looked to be the only one not completely horrified by Bruce’s appearance. That isn’t to say he looked at ease by it, simply that he was better at hiding it than the rest of them. “This is Bruce.” Clark said, gesturing to the mer in the tank. “He’s currently under eight hundred atmospheres of pressure, okay? Considering that would *kill* a human I think we should cut him a little slack for looking a little weird.”

“A *little* weird?" Kara asked, her face still awash with repulsion. “Clark, he looks like an angler fish and mer had a baby, and then the baby fell into an eldritch pit of horror.”

‘Can you tell them it’s rude to talk about someone like that right in front of them.’

Clark flinched at the voice, mostly because he heard none of the usual radio static that usually accompanied it. By the looks of the rest of the companions, they too must have heard the voice.

“He can *talk* ?” Diana asked, turning to Clark, her eyebrows raised.

‘You… can hear me?’ Bruce asked, making a face. He seemed to ponder for a moment, looking up. *‘I suppose it is possible… I’ve just never proxy synced with so many people before.’*

‘It’s not the proxy sync.’ Came J’onn's melodious voice into all their minds. It was strange how soothing it was. Like a balm, it eased Clark and he turned to the Martian currently looking at Bruce from the other side of the tank. Clark hadn’t even noticed him there, silently watching Bruce. *‘I’m using my own telepathic abilities to connect us all. I assumed it would make conversing easier. This way, those involved will not forget the conversation when they leave.’*

‘Oh.’ Bruce let out, his eyebrows raising. *‘That would be very useful, yes.’*

'That being said,' J'onn continued. *'I will not be able to uphold the link whilst I am exploring Hadal's mind. I will in fact need somewhere private and quiet to do it.'*

That caused Joey to turn away from his book. "Will you be able to do it with me inside, or you need me to get out?"

'*Out* .' J'onn said as he walked around the tank towards him. '*Going through one consciousness is challenging enough without having another present*.'

"Understood." Joey said. He gestured towards an open doorway across the room. "There is a bedroom through there."

He walked away and J'onn followed, though not before turning back towards the group. *'I'll sever the connection now.'*

At that, the almost gentle hum that came from hearing everyone's consciousness left and instead Clark heard a faint crackle. ' ~~*Can you still hear me*~~?' Bruce asked.

Clark nodded. "Yeah, I can, hon." He approached the tank, pressing his hand against the glass. "Are you doing okay?"

'~~*I'm fine. Do we know anything about where the labs are yet*~~?'

Not even a moment later, Slade walked in, holding aloft a stack of papers. "No, but we found something." For a moment it looked as though he wouldn't acknowledge the new faces in the room, but then, he glazed at Diana only to do a second, then third take. "God damn, you could just throw me through a wall, couldn't you?" He half whispered.

Clark closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Diana, Victor, Kon, Kara, meet Slade Wilson otherwise known as Deathstroke. Don't listen to anything that comes out of his mouth."

"Now don't say that, Clark. Not whilst beautiful women can hear you." He stepped towards Diana, holding his hand out. "Please, call me Slade."

Diana for the most part looked amused, even offering her own smile. “A pleasure to meet you.” She took his hand, and Clark balked when Slade lifted it to his lips, pressing a kiss across her knuckles. If he was wanting to get thrown through a wall, he was doing a good job of going about it.

He looked up at her, through his lashes. “You single?”

“*Slade.* ” Clark groaned.

“Yes.” Diana responded, and at that single word Clark felt his eyebrows raise all the way to his hairline as he looked at Diana, aghast. “Also, a lesbian.” She added.

Almost immediately, Slade let go of her hand. “Oh.” He let out, looking dejected for a moment, before quickly shrugging. “In that case, I happen to know someone who is also into women who can lift them above their head. I can introduce you.”

“Can we maybe not do this whilst Bruce is trapped in a Goddamn tank.” Clark snapped, his eyes painfully wide as he regarded the scene before him. He looked to the rest of the group for help, but they only watched on with amused smiles.

“Oh, right.” Slade turned to him, and then the rest of the room. “Whilst I love seeing all these new faces, I’m afraid I need to speak to Clark.” When no one moved, Slade sighed. “ *Alone* .”

Diana was the one to respond, crossing her arms as she looked down at Slade. “This concerns us as well. We are here to help, after all.”

“I don’t trust you yet, is the problem.”

“Wait a minute.” Kon said, holding up his hand. “You were just coming on to Diana but now you don’t want to let us stay here 'cause you don’t ‘trust’ us?”

Slade nodded. “Yeah, that’s pretty much the gist of it.”

“Well, it’s not happening.” Kara said, setting her hands on her hips as she approached Slade. “We’re his *family*, so we’re staying. Like it or lump it.”

“You’re his family?” Slade asked, tilting his head. Then, a glint entered his eye unlike any that Clark was familiar with. “Then how come he’s never mentioned you?”

Clark felt his throat tighten as tensions suddenly engulfed the room. From where he stood, he could see Kara's posture crumple ever so slightly. There was silence in the room so profound that even the quiet hum of the submarine couldn’t overcome it. Diana sent him a look and with a quiet sigh she approached Kara, setting her hand on her shoulder. “We will go explore the rest of the submarine whilst you speak.” She said to Slade.

It took a moment, but eventually Kara turned and briskly walked out of the room. Clark didn’t see her face, but he did see Kon’s and that alone caused his stomach to drop further. Victor was the last to leave and when he did, he asked Slade. “Who can I talk to about getting wired into the mainframe?”

“Huh?” Slade asked, distracted. He then turned and gestured out the door. “You’ll find Ravager in the cockpit. Talk to him.”

Victor sent him a nod, and then left too. Once they were alone, Clark felt his jaw tighten. “Thank you for that, by the way.” He ground out.

“What?” Slade asked, shrugging. “You haven’t mentioned them. I didn't even know you had a ‘*family* ’.” He said the last word mockingly and it only caused Clark's anger to rise.

“Do not push me right now, Slade.” He said, surprised by how cold his voice sounded.

It had its intended effect however as Slade looked down at the floor. “Look, I'm sorry for what I said. I just wanted them out of here.”

“Why?” Clark asked, gesturing around the place. “I brought them here to *help* . We can trust them, Slade.”

“Do you forget I'm a wanted criminal or do you just pick and choose when to remember that small detail?” Slade asked, raising an eyebrow.

Clark however shook his head. “They know what you do. And they’re not going to arrest you at the end of this. You help mers, you only kill criminals. That doesn't make *you* a criminal, it makes you a…” Clark took a moment to find the word, and eventually the one J’onn had used earlier came to him. “A vigilante.”

“Okay, well this ‘vigilante’ does not want the ‘Justice League’ poking their noses into his business.” Slade said, eyeing Clark. “They’ll help us with this, and then that will be it. Understood?”

“Got it.” Clark said with a loud exhale. “Now will you tell me what you found?”

“Right.” Slade said as he held up the stack of paper once more. “Hadal was talking to someone. Here are some of the responses. I think you’re gonna wanna read them.” He passed them off to Clark, who looked down at the first one. It took him a moment to read the contents, but not because of the amount of text in it. Quite the opposite, actually.

He found himself rereading the words on the paper hoping for them to make sense. “It just says ‘no’ and then a love heart.” Clark said, frowning in confusion.

Slade however only nodded. “Look at who it’s from.”

Clark had taken in that detail, but the name did little to lessen his confusion. He read the last line of the letter aloud. “‘From your only friend, Napier’.”

“Napier.” Slade repeated. “*Jack* napier.”

“Am I meant to know who that is?” Clark asked, going to hand them back, only for Slade to gesture to the stack. Clark took the hint and went to the next page. Finding only similar contents. Another no, this time accompanied by a crudely drawn picture of Hadal in drag. The next letter; the word no, and then what Clark could only describe as a small man with a penis coming out of his ass. “Whoever this Napier is, he seems like a moron.” Was all he said as he handed the stack back to Slade who this time took them.

“That ‘moron’ is the owner and operator of one of the biggest mer auction houses in America.”

At the words, Clark's frown grew. He shook his head, and gestured to the letters. “The man who drew Hadal in lace lingerie is the man responsible for running a mer auction house?”

“One of the *biggest* mer auction houses, yeah.” Slade said, shaking his head. “I’ve been after Napier longer than I have Hadal.”

“And he’s alluded you.”

“That’s because despite acting the fool, he’s the smartest fucker in the game.” Slade sighed as he rifled through the papers. “The auctions in general are a literal nightmare to track down. I’ve never even seen an invite, never heard a whisper about one happening. We only learn about them after the fact, and by that point the staff and mers have been cleared out and the place is deserted.”

Clark grew pensive at the words and eventually asked. “So why was Napier sending Hadal those letters?”

“That’s the question.” Slade said. “We’re hoping to find Hadal’s letters somewhere and get some context. He faxes them so there must be a paper trail. Maybe in one of his labs, or maybe even here somewhere. If Napier’s responses were in his office here, stands to reason his letters might be, too. Point is, we need to find out *what* he was asking Napier, and more importantly, we need to find out why Napier’s only response was ever ‘no.’”

“Are all his letters like that?” Clark asked, worried about what other drawings must be within.

“Yup.” Slade said, setting the stack down on the counter. “Some of them date back a year, meaning this has been going on for a while.”

“Jesus.” Clark said, looking down at the floor. “But what does it mean?”

“We’ll find out when we have Hadal’s ciphers or his letters.” Slade said as he turned his attention to the doorway Joey and J'onn had left through, only for the former to be walking back through it, now in his own body. “Speak of the devil, how is--”

But Joey shook his head, putting a finger to his lips. ‘Be quiet,’ he synced.

Slade rolled his eye and then gestured to the doorway. “How is it going in there?” He whispered.

Joey nodded. ‘Hadal is under sedation, and M'. J'onn is currently in his mind. He said the process can take anywhere from one to several hours.’

“Great.” Slade said, crossing his arms. “You told him to focus on finding out how to work the tank, right?”

‘Slade’ Bruce cut in, frowning. ‘I’m fine. What he needs to do is find out where Tim--’

“Look, Tim is most likely asleep in a tank right now, you on the other hand are a stray bullet away from exploding.”

‘Good thing no one plans on shooting me then!’ Bruce ground out. ‘Imean it, Slade. I can handle this. Focus on finding Tim.’

Joey held up his hands, looking between the two. ‘He said the mind is a complex place. Information isn’t simply lying around for him to find, he needs time to explore. He said he will find out what he can and let us know his findings as soon as possible.’

“Great. Just great.” Slade muttered. When Joey remained quiet, he let out a sharp breath. “Alright, let’s go back to looking around the sub. Maybe we missed something.”

“I gotta say, it’s trippy only hearing half a conversation.” Came Victor’s voice from the door, he held up his hand as Slade whirled on him. “I come bearing good news.” He said as he approached the tank and after typing something into the console, a hiss could be heard emanating from the top and bottom of the tank. “Found the tank's instructions in Hadal’s mess of files. I set it to the slowest decompression setting. Didn’t want any risk of 'explosions'.” He turned to the mer and offered a smile. “You should be out of there in twenty four hours.”

“*Twenty four* ?” Slade and Clark blurted out in near unison.

Victor turned away from the panel towards them. “The paper I found talking about this tank said the decompression process can be done quicker, but at added risk to the mer.” Victor raised a brow. “I sort of assumed you’d want this to be as safe as possible.”

Slade and Clark grew quiet as they turned their attention to the mer in the tank. “You gonna be okay in there for a day?” Clark asked.

Bruce’s jaw clenched but he did a good job of keeping his expression otherwise neutral. ‘~~I told you. I’ll be fine~~.’

“Okay. That’s one thing sorted at least." Slade said as he clasped his hands together. “Until the Martian is done poking around Hadal’s brain, we should go back to looking around the sub.” Slade looked at Bruce. “You gonna be okay in here with Jericho for a while? I wanna borrow Clark’s super vision to find hiding spots.”

‘~~Of course, just~~…’ Bruce went quiet. ‘~~Can I have a minute alone with him~~?’

Slade looked surprised but the expression only remained for a moment before slipping back it usual calm veneer. He turned towards the door, ushering Victor and Joey right along with him as he left. After Clark heard the footsteps fade to nothing, Clark turned to Bruce, holding his hand to the glass.

“You okay, B?”

All of a sudden what must have been keeping Bruce together, snapped, leaving only distress as he curled against the glass. ‘Everything hurts.’ He managed to get out, his hands pressing in vain against Clark’s.

Clark’s eyes blew wide as he stared into the tank. The most immediate thing he felt was the rush of adrenaline pumping through his system. It was as though he was in fight or flight, but the issue was he could do neither. Instead, all he could do was hold his hand against the glass and try to get Bruce's attention. “B, it will be okay. Twenty four hours will pass like nothing, then when you’re out everything will be fine, just--”

‘My stomach.’ He whispered, staring at Clark with those big black eyes. ‘It hurts...so much.’

“I know.” Clark said softly, pressing in closer to the glass. “But you can do it. You’re so strong, you’re gonna get through this and once you're out I will buy you all the steak you want. I promise.”

That caused Bruce to smile at least, though the effect was somewhat limited by the receded lips and well, other differences. And yet, despite those changes in appearance, Clark could still read Bruce like always and when those eyes slid back onto him, he could feel the warmth there. ‘You know what I'd really like?’ Bruce whispered.

“Anything. Anything you want B, i'll get it for you." Clark said earnestly. “Anything.”

Bruce smiled and then said one word. ‘Chocolate.’

“Choc--” but Clark faltered, making a face. “*Chocolate* ?”

Bruce’s smile remained, but as Clark’s confusion only grew, he tilted his head. ‘You don’t remember?’

Clark only let out an exasperated breath. “I thought we had established, hon, that I don’t remember a lot.”

‘But you r/emember~…’ Bruce said quietly, before looking away. ‘Unless... unless//you’re blocking it. Lemme/try/tø--’

Just then, Clark felt as though something was jabbing at his brain, a pain akin to a sharp headache. The suddenness of it had him gasping and stumbling back, only for Bruce’s expression to morph to concern as he tried to swim to the side to better see Clark. ‘Are/you/okay?’

“I… I don’t know.” Clark brought his hand up to rub his temple, eyeing Bruce warily. “Did you do that?”

Bruce frowned. ‘I did, but I shouldn't have hurt. Maybe it’s/…’ Bruce cut himself off, pressing his forehead against the glass and once more the jabbing pain returned. Clark winced, but this time, he managed to keep his composure. Bruce brought a hand up, ushering him forward and Clark got the hint. He came up to the tank and pressed his forehead against the glass.

Only for nothing to happen.

The pain didn’t get worse, which was something but apparently what Bruce wanted to happen, didn't, so with a frustrated hiss, he stopped and pulled back, slapping his hands against the tank. ‘Fuck this tank.’

Clark looked on in sympathy. “I know hon, but you’ll be out of it soon.”

‘No,/you/don’t understand, I could--’ but he cut himself off again with a sigh. ‘Never/mind. /You’re not/going/to/remember this anyway.’

“I want to remember.” Clark said quietly.

That caused Bruce to look at him, his eyes boring into his own. ‘Then/you/need/to/come into the water with/me.’

Clark faltered, imagining the last time they had tried that. “I don’t think…”

Bruce however only looked more resolute. ‘It’s the only way. I need to deal with whatever is blocking those memories, and I can only do that in this form and without glass between us.’

Clark understood the logic. He just didn’t want to go poking at what was back there in his mind. For some reason he knew it wasn’t Bruce's true form that was haunting him. It was something else. The memory had changed and morphed just like Bruce, and whatever was really there hid behind a door in his mind he did not want to open. Yet, as he looked at Bruce he only found himself nodding. “Alright Bruce, I'll do it.”

Bruce gave a single nod and crossed his arms. ‘Whilst I appreciate the words, I’m going to need to speak to Slade to get him to remind you when you won’t be able to remember this conversation.’

“Yeah, that makes sense.” Clark said with a bob of the head. He took a deep breath and came in close to the tank. “So are you feeling any better?”

‘A little.’ Bruce conceded, with a small smile. ‘Talking helped. It kept me distracted.’

“Well, I can sit here and talk whilst we wait for J’onn. There are two Kryptonian’s on the sub if Slade needs a pair of 'super eyes'.” Clark said as he turned and got a nearby chair. He set it down beside the tank and sat down. “Just make sure to not say anything too important 'cause I ain't gonna remember it.”

Bruce gave a playful smile as he tucked into the corner of the tank beside Clark. ‘I’ll keep it as banal as possible.’

So they chatted for what felt like hours. Occasionally Clark would tune in to the goings on around the ship; Kon was wandering around the sub, guided by Slade who sounded far too at ease dealing with his easily distractible clone. He then heard Victor and Grant talking in the cockpit as Joey worked with Kara and Diana in exploring every inch of Hadal’s office. Then of course there was J’onn who was near silent as he sat, eyes unblinking, beside Hadal’s unconscious body.

Whilst there was still so much to do, Clark enjoyed his quiet reprieve with Bruce, knowing it would be the last until Bruce was finally out of the tank.

Chapter End Notes

Ayyyyyyy happy Friday all! B)

I wanted to get this chapter out before the weekend as it's my birthday on Monday and as I'm at uni currently and Monday is one of my class days (Yay 🙃) it means this weekend is gonna be when I celebrate so I'm gonna be too busy to upload then. So rather than wait till after the weekend I was like, eh, let's upload it before ;)

Anyway, yay! Clark has made up with Diana, Bruce is still in the tank, but at least there is now light at the end of the tunnel, and a certain Mr. Napier has been introduced. I do wonder what will happen with him? (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°) As for Tim... Only time will tell.

As always, thank you for your kind words and comments! They mean the world to me :D Also please check out TheGothamKnight's piece he did of Bruce's abyssal form here!

Lemme know your thoughts on this chapter below and I will catch you all next time, most likely after my birthday ;) Take care everyone! :D

Chapter 37

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An hour later, J’onn emerged.

Bruce had dozed off in that time and Clark had taken to simply sitting quietly beside him, whiling away the minutes until someone, anyone, returned to the lab. He half expected that person to be Slade, but instead it was J'onn who approached him holding something in his hand and wearing a solemn look that spoke volumes of what he had just put himself through. “I know the locations of the laboratories.” He said simply.

Clark fought the urge to jump up and celebrate. After all, things in his life never were as simple as they first appeared and the last thing he needed was to jump the gun on this one especially. He did however offer a smile at the news. “That’s great.”

J’onn gave a smile of his own as he turned to the tank and gestured to the control panel. “I believe Victor has already dealt with the tanks decompression sequence, correct?”

“Yeah, he did that about an hour ago.” Clark said as he crossed his arms and leant back in the chair. “Said it will take twenty four hours if we want to be as safe as possible.”

J’onn nodded, his attention still on the control panel. “That is correct. It can be done faster, but given I have seen what happens to the mers subjected to that, I agree with Victor.”

Clark winced. “God, yeah. How was rooting around Hadal’s mind?”

J’onn was quiet for a moment, that solemn expression returning as he looked down at the floor. Eventually he chanced a look at Clark, his eyes narrowing by the barest of margins. “He is not a good man.”

Clark found himself nodding. “Yeah, that checks out.” He said, as he pressed his lips together, casting his stare downward. “Which is why I wanna thank you for doing this, J’onn. I know it’s a lot. After all these years I show up out of the blue and the first thing I ask you to do, is to root around a psycho’s head.” He looked up at the man. “I want you to know I really appreciate it.”

“We are friends, Clark.” He said, the corner of his mouth curling upward. “I will always assist you when you need me to.”

Clark’s smile grew, but one look at the sleeping mer at his side caused it falter. “So aside from the labs, anything else you found?”

He then held up what he was holding. "I wrote down his ciphers as best as I could understand them. Here." He handed the book over and Clark couldn't help but flick it open and take a look at its contents. As he did, J'onn continued. “As for what else I found, it is hard to explain. You see, thoughts and ideas present themselves as abstractions to me. Sometimes they are easy to understand, but other times, it is much harder. The location of the labs was somewhat simple, as were the ciphers, but for some reason, the security measures at these labs were more complex to comprehend."

Clark raised a brow. “Security measures?”

“The codes for the locks as well as the other mechanisms used to protect the mers from would be intruders.” J’onn said with a nod. “I will not lie to you, Clark. Some of the mechanisms I do not truly understand at the present moment.”

Clark shut the book and ran his hand across the cover. “It’s more than we had before, J’onn. Even if you don’t fully get it, I'm sure once we’re there we’ll be able to figure it out.”

“That is my hope, too.” J’onn said with a nod, before turning his head towards the door.

Clark almost asked what it was, until his own hearing answered that question for him. Footsteps were approaching and soon Slade’s body filled the doorframe. He looked at them both with mild contempt. “When were you gonna tell me the Martian was up?” He asked, his irate stare now directed solely at Clark.

It wasn't, however, Clark who responded. Instead J'onn offered a small nod of the head. "I know where the laboratories are."

Slade's brows raised at that. He moved further into the room, now revealing Kon stood behind him; hair tinted with dust and clothing equally dishevelled. "That's great!" Slade said, clapping his hands together. "You best go to the cockpit and speak to Ravager. Give him the coordinates so we can get moving."

J'onn nodded. "I will do just that."

Once he was gone, Slade and Kon left the doorway and came up to Clark. Slade went towards the tank, peering in at Bruce's sleeping face as Kon crossed his arms and managed to fill the entirety of Clark's vision with as much irate energy as he could muster. "So, how were things here, Clark?" He asked, tilting his head and revealing what looked to be cobwebs also stuck in it. "Mine was great, by the way. I spent it crawling around the air ducts with this asshole yelling at me."

"Hey, you're smaller than me and have superpowers, which means you're better suited to getting into all the nooks and crannies around here." Slade shrugged a shoulder. "And if you didn't wanna get yelled at you should get your super hearing checked out."

Clark raised a brow. "Did you find anything, at least?"

"Nah." Slade said, with a smile. "But *I* had fun."

Kon's expression only grew more sour. "You're a terrible person." Was all he said as he went to leave the lab. "I'm gonna go find Diana and Kara and tell them we know where the labs are."

He did just that, and when he was gone, Slade's smile immediately dropped as he jerked his head to Bruce's sleeping form. "How's he been?"

"Good." Clark said, with a small nod. "He's hurting, but I don't think being trapped in a tank is helping much. We've just been chatting, trying to take his mind off things. Then he nodded off and I've just been keeping an eye on him since."

Clark could feel relief radiate off of Slade at those words. He nodded. “Good. The more he sleeps the better. Time will pass by quicker and will mean he has less time to overthink.”

“Yeah, I know that feeling.” Clark muttered as he stared at the sleeping mer. Like this, he looked so peaceful. It was hard to believe the panic and terror that must have been consuming him only a few hours prior. Clark himself had already felt he was back to normal, physically at least. He'd only remembered what he had gone through when he’d occasionally glance down at himself and see the torn and bloody shirt he still wore.

It was as he looked down at the blood once more that he spoke. “Whilst we were talking. We also decided that once he’s out of there, I'm gonna go into the water with him.”

“Finally.” Slade said with a roll of the eyes. “He’s been wanting to get you in there for a while now, you know.”

Clark gave a squirrely shrug. “Yeah, well. Last time we tried it, I broke his rib, so.”

“Yeah, I forgot you’re a terrible person.”

Clark levelled Slade’s stare. “Must be why we get along so well.” He deadpanned. “Terrible recognises terrible.”

“Aw, you think we get along.” Slade said sweetly, as he clasped his hands together and swayed his shoulders from side to side. “Next you’re gonna say you're in love with me, and then after that, we're gonna bone.”

“Goddamn it...” Clark grimaced. “I gotta ask. Do you do this with everyone?”

“Do what?”

“You know exactly what.”

Slade evidently did. “Depends.”

“*On* ?” Clark prompted, with wide eyes.

“On if they can punch me in the face and look good doing it.” Slade said with a nonchalant wave of the hand. “Take your lady friend, Diana. Goddamn, if she let me, I'd worship those arms of hers.”

“You really are an enigma...” Clark muttered, taking in the others wistful expression.

“What? I like what I like, I know what I don't like.” Slade said with a shrug. “More than most can say.”

Clark was taken aback by the words, not because they confused him, but because of how much they resonated with him. For most of his life he had never been unsure of himself when it came to his sexuality. He knew he liked Lana when he was a teenager, he knew he liked Lois as an adult, and of course, now he knows he likes Bruce. Sure, the latter was a challenge for him to come to grips with at first, but it was never because Bruce was a man. He never had that quiet moment of realization that he wasn’t straight, because he truthfully never thought he was. He simply liked who he liked; the sex of his partners never once being a part of that equation. “That’s fair.” He said softly. After a few moments, Clark’s eyebrow quirked upward. “So Selina… she can punch you, then?”

Slade let out a huff of laughter. “I know she looks petite, but she can go toe to toe with the best of them. She fights like a street cat, all claws, hissing and biting." He said the last word with a wink. "She also happens to look incredible when she does it.” He then turned to Clark and wiggled his eyebrows. “She also happens to share my tastes.”

Slade held his stare as though waiting for something, and eventually realization did indeed wash across Clark’s face. “Your ‘friend’…” Clark began, his eyes narrowing. “You were talking about Selina, weren’t you?”

“Guilty as charged.” Slade said, nodding solemnly with one hand held up.

Clark didn’t even say anything, simply letting out a choked groan as he winced and looked away. It was then that he heard movement in the submarine's structure, and he starkly realized they were now moving. He looked around quickly and found Grant in the cockpit with Victor and J’onn. When he looked even further, he found Diana, Kara and Kon chatting in a small living space. Joey however, was nowhere to be found. Clark voiced that observation to Slade.

“He’s in our boat. Gonna take it to the lab with us and tow yours with it. Didn’t want to leave them in the open ocean and all that.”

Clark looked out the back of the sub, training his eyes through the hull of metal and found Joey as Slade had described him; piloting Slade's boat with Clark’s own being taken along for the ride. At this, Clark turned back to Slade who had resumed staring at Bruce. “What do we do now?”

Slade remained quiet for a moment, before turning a fraction towards Clark. “*I'm* gonna prepare. *You're* gonna stay here with Bruce. First things first, I'll check on Hadal and make sure he’s still restrained and top up his sedatives while I'm at it.”

Slade left and once Clark was alone with Bruce again, he spent more time sitting and waiting. Only this time, he must have dozed off as well as before he knew it, strange dreams filled his mind.

It was the same one he always had, but it was different now. He was down at the bottom of the ocean, only this time, the thing before his eyes looked different. It was smaller, with hair, holding an eel as it eyed him in terror.

It swam away, and then the dream shifted. He was approaching the pool again, only this time the thing was sitting on the edge. It looked at Clark once more, though this time it didn’t swim away, it simply stared at him.

He woke up upon feeling someone bump his shoulder.

He cracked open an eye and saw Diana’s face before him. “Your friend asked me to inform you that we’ve arrived.”

Clark huffed as he sat up in his chair. He stretched out and rubbed the kink that had developed in his neck. After taking in Bruce's still sleeping form beside him, he turned to Diana. “Slade is not my ‘friend’, D. He’s an annoyance, at best.”

“An annoyance you seem rather amicable with.” Diana said as she stepped back and allowed Clark to stand.

“Believe me, it’s not by choice.” Clark muttered as he looked around the sub, aware that most of the inhabitants were already near the exit of it. He turned back to Diana. “Slade tell you what the plan was?”

“Perhaps I wasn’t clear with my words.” Diana said as she crossed her arms. “Slade told me to inform you we arrived. That was *all* he told me.”

Clark shook his head. Really he should have expected as much from the man. That didn’t change the current issue though. “Problem is, I don’t want to leave Bruce alone until I know what the plan is.” He said as he gestured to the tank.

Diana’s face grew sympathetic as she turned towards the door. “Slade did say he would send ‘Jericho’ down to keep an eye on Bruce.”

Sure enough Clark could hear approaching footsteps and when he looked to the door, Joey’s blond curls came into view. He brought his hands up. ‘D A D I S U P S T A I R S W A I T I N G.’

“I already informed him.” Diana said as she watched the mans hands.

Clark frowned. “Wait. You know sign language?”

Diana turned back to him, an eyebrow raised. “Of course.” She said with an elegant haughtiness that only she ever seemed capable of expressing. “I’ve taken to learning a multitude of languages over the years, ASL being one of them.” She then turned to Joey and whilst speaking, moved her hands in time with her words. “I will escort him upstairs now.” Without a word, she left, leaving Clark no choice but to follow. He chanced a look at Bruce, before eyeing Joey.

“Call me if you need me, alright?” It was then that he remembered what he was holding, he held it out to Joey who reached out to take it. "Also, here. J'onn gave it to me. It's Hadal's ciphers. You can start going through his journals whilst you wait for us to get back."

Joey's eyes blew wide as he nodded emphatically. With that, Clark rushed after Diana who was waiting for him in the other room before they made their way upstairs. Once there, they found Kon and Kara with Slade and J’onn. Victor and Grant appeared to still be in the cockpit and after coming to a stop before the group Clark clasped his hands together and nodded to Slade. “So what’s the plan, Slade?” He asked as the man in question fiddled around with his gun holster.

“The Martian has informed me of the security measures Hadal has in place around the lab. I *was* gonna get Jericho to possess Hadal again to get through the biometric ones, but then he also informed me he can shapeshift as well as read minds which really,” Slade paused and eyed J’onn, “makes you my new best friend.”

“Please, call me J’onn.” He said, his lip twitching in a way that only a few would recognize as a smile.

Slade smiled back. “Alright, so whilst J’onn deals with the locks and other security systems in place, I want us to stick together whilst we search. No, ‘Scooby Doo, let’s split up gang’ BS. If there are mers in there, blackfins especially, I don’t want someone who can’t sync with them being the first to find them. It might cause them to panic.” He looked around at them all, and when everyone remained silent he raised a brow. “Are we all clear on that?”

Everyone nodded and with that Slade opened the hatchway, flooding the room with sunlight. “Alright, let’s go.”

With the light flooding in it took a few moments for Clark’s eyes to adjust. When they did, he saw the long concrete dock before him. It was a jump from the hatch to the ground and yet before Slade even had a chance to lower the walkway, everyone aside from him had already jumped down, Clark included. They stared up at Slade, who waited until the walkway was fully extended before walking down it to join the rest of them. Once at the bottom, he stared at those around him and then raised a brow. “What? I'm old. I have bad knees.”

Only Clark rolled his eyes at that and once he did, he was able to turn and look at the island before him. It looked unassuming enough, filled with foliage and rolling hills that did well in obscuring the laboratory from them. If it wasn’t for the long strip of concrete coming off of the island, Clark might

not have even noticed anything amiss if he just happened to be sailing by. As they however walked to the end of it and followed the path through the trees they ended up in the clearing where the lab resided.

The building itself was sleek and modern, its white walls shining all the brighter in the harsh sun. As Clark stared at it, a strange sensation of deja vu washed over him. He looked around at his teammates, but none of them seemed to give the building a second look and so he ignored that feeling and followed after them, finding Slade and J'onn already by the door.

As the group stared at their current obstacle, Clark took the time to look around at the trees and hills surrounding them. In doing so, he noticed that there was another dock on the other side of the island. This one had a boat yard holding several vehicles Clark didn't recognize as well as one that he did. It was the boat he had seen Hadal driving when he had come to Cottonwood all that time ago. So they were definitely on his island at least. He just hoped this was the lab they needed.

There was also an unassuming building right beside the yard, but from what Clark could see, there was nothing but concrete floors and walls inside.

By the time he turned his attention back to the group he saw J'onn in front of a small computer screen that folded out of the wall. Just then, his whole body morphed, and in only a few moments he was Hadal, replete with lab coat and dishevelled hair.

He pressed in close to the camera, his eye right in front of the lense. After a light began to blink, he said, "the sea cures all ailments of man," and once the words were spoken, the sound of locks disengaging could be heard. When it fell silent, he stepped forward and pushed open the door, revealing the interior which only caused Clark's deja vu to return in full force.

Whilst the outside felt familiar, Clark could justify that as it being a common style of architecture. In Metropolis for instance, houses with a similar aesthetic had littered the shore fronts there. The interior however, he couldn't use the same logic for. He never went *into* those Metropolis homes for instance, so why did the inside of Hadal's home send a shiver down his back as though he had stepped into a room just like this before? It had to be recent, that was for sure, but the only homes other than his own he had been inside recently were Porter's and Selina's.

The lightbulb moment then struck and Clark found himself taking in all the finishes with renewed interest. *That* was why it looked so familiar. Selina's home was just like this. The clean lines, the modern finishes, even the marble top counters. It was uncanny how alike they were.

As everyone breezed past him taking it all in, Slade came to a stop beside him. “Look at the door handles.” He whispered as he then moved past him and went further inside.

There was a doorway that the group headed towards and with Slade’s words and his own thoughts swirling around his mind, Clark slowly followed after them. They had already gone through it by the time he reached it and as the door slowly closed, Clark reached out for the handle and the moment he looked at it, he felt his mouth fall open.

Gold glimmered back at him.

“No way.” He muttered to himself and after noticing everyone had gone down the stairs on the other side of the door, he hurried after them. By the time he had found them, they were stopped by another doorway, and after J’onn worked his magic again, the door swung open revealing the modest lab within. It was almost identical to the one in the submarine, and as such, Clark felt a shiver run through him. He knew the sentiment was shared as he saw the rest of the group slowly take in the myriad of empty tanks dotted around the place.

Across the room, there was a large metal door blocking their path, but unlike the others, there was no keypad or monitor beside it. At this, Slade turned to them all. “Everyone take a look around, there has gotta be a way to open the door that we aren't seeing.”

At those words the group started to look around the lab, pouring over everything they could find. Clark however was preoccupied and the moment Slade was on his own by some shelves in the corner, Clark came in close behind him. “Walter,” was all he said.

Slade nodded. “We’ll pay him a visit when we get back, right now though, we have to focus on Tim.”

“Right.” Clark said as he turned his attention to the door. This one made the front door pale in comparison. It was a huge thing, made of steel about a foot thick. Slade noticed where Clark’s attention was pulled and nodded towards it.

“You see mers behind it?”

Clark focused and then faltered. “No.”

Slade however only nodded. “I thought as much. The last lab I managed to get into had fake rooms and traps everywhere. You see the big heavy looking door and think that must be where the mers are, but no.” He shook his head and turned around to address the room. “Alright, gang. Chances are that door is a red herring. We need to find a hidden door, maybe behind a wall, or-”

“It’s here.”

Slade and Clark whipped their heads and found Kara by one of the many examination tables. It looked different from the others, with a piece of metal jutting out from the side of it. She was staring at the floor by the base of it and sure enough when Clark looked there too, he saw a ladder heading straight down. “Nice find, Kara.” He said as he approached.

For the most part Kara looked indifferent as she stepped back from the table. Clark expected as much. After Slade had succeeded in pouring napalm onto his very delicate bridges, he knew he had to talk to not just her, but Kon, about the past four years. He really had taken it for granted how readily they had welcomed him back. Really, *this* was what he deserved. Cold indifference.

Slade however, either not caring or not noticing the cold, simply clasped his hands together. “Perfect, now we need to find a the control panel that moves the table. Everyone get looking.” He clapped his hands and given the plethora of supervision on offer it took longer than expected to find the panel. It was after Kon had politely raised his hand and asked why they couldn’t move the table manually, to which Slade responded with, “for the same reason we didn’t rip the front door off its hinges to get in.”

After that, and a bit more searching they found what they were after. It was Kara once again who found it. Entirely due to her being the only one to open the vat labelled 'chum' and reveal the mass of rotting fish carcasses within. There was a small unassuming keypad just above the surface of rot. She got everyone's attention and Slade approached with a fond smile. “You ever think about leaving the ‘super friends’, blondie. You let me know.”

Despite the obvious attempt to keep her expression neutral, a small smile touched Kara's face as she stepped back and let Slade look inside the vat. He pinched his nose and made a face as he stared at the rotting mass. “Alright, J’onn, work your magic.”

J’onn however didn’t move closer. “I don’t believe that will move the table.”

Slade paused, and as the awful stench grew, he shut the lid and turned back to J'onn. "You don't?"

"I am going through what I found in Hadal's mind, and it simply does not feel right. For this room, I saw images of fire, angels and horses. No rot or fish."

"Wait, images?" Kon asked. "You don't just see how to open the hatchway?"

J'onn turned to regard him. "I mentioned it to Clark earlier, but I do not perceive thought as anything binary. I see it as images and sounds. When I recall what I saw about this room in his mind, Hadal's thoughts for it were not linked with anything I would describe as a numeric code."

Slade looked around at the group. Perhaps if he had seen someone like himself that held out hope that this was the correct way to open the hatchway he might have held his ground, but as it stood, he was met with only apprehensive stares so as such, he sighed. "Alright, everyone keep looking."

After another five minutes, and with the stench of fish having mostly dissipated, Clark was the one to stumble upon something. He was looking at the books on one of the shelves when his eyes caught one that looked out of place. The rest were all books on marine life and then there it was, a humble bible.

Clark didn't take Hadal for a religious man and so he pulled at the book. It however wasn't linked to any sort of mechanism and it came out easily. Ready to leave it at that and slide it back into place, Clark instead, opened it up. Inside, he saw nothing but text filled pages, and yet, he kept on looking.

"What is that?" J'onn asked as he approached where he stood.

"A bible." Clark said as he closed it and lifted it up higher. "It just seemed odd to me, but it's probably nothing--"

"No, no." J'onn said as he shook his head. "This fits. The angels, the fire and horses. It's religious imagery. Imagery that would be prominent in say, the bible. This book must hold the answer as to how to move the table."

Clark looked down at it and only frowned. “It’s just, I don’t see anything out of the--” but he cut himself off as he stared down at the book intently. He looked through the book and saw something. It was hidden in the cover, a small thing that no one aside from a super or the man who put it there would have ever known was there. “A microchip?”

“What's that?” Slade asked as he approached.

“There is a microchip in the bible.” Clark said, holding it up. “I don’t know why though.”

J’onn however took the book from his hand and approached the examination table. The rest of the room watched as he placed the book on the metal surface jutting out along the side of the table. The moment contact was made, the sound of gears moving filled the room. J’onn stepped back and slid the book back into place and once done, the table slid to the side, revealing the hidden hatchway underneath.

“I’m just saying it now.” Kon said as he slowly walked up to the hatch. “The man who did all this… is *insane* .”

“Here here.” Slade said with a nod. “Anything else we need to be aware of?” He asked, turning to J’onn,

He shook his head. “None that I recall. I will head down first though, just to be certain.”

He did just that, approaching the hatch and finding the almost appreciable slit in the ground along the edge. He worked his fingernails into it and lifted the lid, showing the ladder leading all the way down. He placed his feet into the rungs, and slowly made his way down. The sound of thudding made its way up the column, and never seemed to end, only growing more distant. Eventually the sound stopped and a quiet voice called up from the bottom. “You can make your way down.”

“Jesus.” Was what Slade said as he automatically went next. “This is overkill, even for Hadal.”

They didn't wait for Slade to get to the bottom before the rest of the group followed after. Once they were all down at the bottom, the air in the place felt completely different. It was musty, with a strong briny smell that at least made Clark believe they were close to what they were after.

The lab equipment in this room also didn't look like the stuff upstairs. Everything down here appeared used and worn, with almost nothing looking as though it was new. Even the computers appeared to be older and nothing like the high tech machinery acting as a guise above. Clark looked around the place, and quickly found what they were after. He felt his heart start to hammer. "In there." He said, as he pointed to a set of double doors leading off from the lab. "There are mers in there."

"Alright, let's not get ahead of ourselves, now." Slade said as he approached the door. "Anything we need to be wary of with this one, J'onn?"

The Martian was silent for a moment as he thought, only then did he say. "There is a mechanism. I am afraid Hadal's mind was not clear as to what it is. When I went through his mind it simply showed him opening the door, and yet, there is definitely something in place. I just cannot say what."

"Wonderful." Slade muttered, holding his ear to the door and closing his eye. Clark himself could hear moving water coming from within, as well as the quiet thumping of multiple heartbeats. When Slade pulled from the doorway, he faced them all. "Alright. You all know the drill."

Thankfully, this one didn't take long to figure out, mostly due to Clark using his super vision to really *look* at what was on the other side of the door. He saw a box above the doorway and it was as he looked at the wiring within it that he saw what it connected to. "There is a mechanism on the other side but it's not attached to the door." Clark said as he turned to face the group, most of whom were currently rifling through drawers. "There is a pressure plate on the floor."

"A pressure plate?" Slade asked, as he crouched down and tried to peek under the slight gap under the door. He however must not have seen anything as he looked up at Clark, and raised a brow. "You sure?"

"I'm looking at the wiring right now." He said, his eyes trailing the fine lines of it, running from the box, through the wall beside him, and down into the floor. "It's a pressure plate."

“Anything about a pressure plate in the noggin of yours, J’onn?”

J’onn was quiet for a moment, his eyes closed in concentration. After a few moments he opened them once more and went towards the door. “I believe I can just--”

He opened the door, and a click could be heard. The room collectively held its breath and when J’onn stepped forward, he stepped onto the pressure plate. Another click sounded, and after a few beats he stepped off of it. Clark waited, though for what, he didn’t know. Maybe it was the sound of suffocation, or even explosions. Instead, blissful quiet remained and when it lasted for over a minute, Clark looked at J’onn and let out the breath he was holding. “Way to give us heart attacks.”

“Yeah, J’onn.” Kon sighed. “Could have warned us.”

“My theory is that the pressure plate is programmed for Hadal’s approximate weight, give or take a few pounds. If it registers someone too light or too heavy to be on it, it sets off the emergency protocol.”

Clark looked at Slade, waiting for some sort of remark, but the man wasn’t even paying attention to them anymore. He was instead looking at the large tanks before them and he rushed past J’onn jumping over the pad on the floor as he did. Clark followed after, his eyes blowing wide as he took in the sight within the room.

The tanks he was looking at were unlike any he had ever seen. They were on par with an aquarium, with vast swarfs of water and pristine glass filling the room. The tanks themselves ran deep underground, with the surface being at their waist level. Steel steps and walkways criss-crossing just above the water and Slade ran up one of them and out across the water, falling down onto the grating once in the middle of the vast tank. He bent down low and screamed at the surface. “Tim! Tim are you here, answer me!”

After he was finished, everyone watched the surface of the water with unwavering attention. Clark himself inched towards Slade, crouching down beside him and preparing for the inevitable ‘there are always the other labs we can check’ speech to have to leave his lips.

But he didn’t have to say that.

He didn’t need to say that as a mer poked his head above the water that looked horrifyingly familiar and not in the way that he was expecting.

He stared wide eyed at the mer.

Marcos' eyes stared back.

Still stuck in his thoughts, Clark barely noticed the mer speak. “Are you Slade?” He asked, his voice only adding to that unnerving bout of familiarity.

“I am. Is he in here?” Despite how his heart hammered, Slade was doing a great job of not letting it come across in his voice or expression.

“He is, he is just very sick.” At Clark and Slade’s silence, he went on. “Withdrawal.”

“Can you bring him up to the surface? We’re gonna get you all out. How many of you are there down there?”

“Five in total. There's me, Steph, Cass, Duke and Tim.”

“And what’s your name?”

“Jaime.”

For some reason that name echoed in Clark's mind, and the longer he stared at Jaime's face the more he couldn’t help but dwell on how similar he and Marcos looked. It was uncanny.

“Alright, Jaime.” Slade said, jerking his head to the group of people still waiting at the doorway. “I have some friends here who are gonna help, so I need you to tell everyone to come to the surface so we can get the lungs off of you and get you to safety, alright?”

Jaime only nodded and once he ducked back under the water, Clark turned to Slade, wanting to voice the only thing occupying his mind in that moment, but knowing now was not the best time for it. Instead, he stood up on shaky legs and made his way back to solid ground and after a few minutes, more faces came out of the water, poking out along the tanks edge, including one Slade gasped at.

“Tim…” he whispered as he rushed to the edge of the tank and took the mer in his arms, pulling him from the water and out onto the ground, holding him tight. Despite what must have been a joyous reunion, Tim only let out a low groan that struck Clark for how similar it sounded to the ones Bruce made.

“He’s hurting bad. We all are.” A mer said, and when Clark looked to the source, he saw a blonde haired mer, her face awash with concern. “Where are you going to take us?”

Slade was reaching for something in one of his belt pockets. When he found it, he brought it up to Tim’s neck and began prodding the mechanism wrapped around it. “There is a doctor in Sacramento we’re gonna take you to.” Slade said as he readjusted Tim's position on the floor and poked at the mechanism around his neck in earnest. “Her name is Leslie. She’s kin, and she’s gonna take care of y’all until you’re better.”

“Speaking of, how did Hadal even get you guys down here?” Kon asked as he approached. “‘Cause it definitely wasn’t down that ladder.”

“There is a platform elevator down that way.” Jaime said, pointing across the cavernous space to the unassuming doorway tucked in the corner. “It takes you up to the surface.”

Clark thought of the building he had seen earlier. The concrete room that now that he truly thought about it, had a long shaft running underneath it. “I know that building. It's by the boat yard.” Clark said as he turned to the group behind him. “J’onn you might need to go ahead and figure out the controls for the elevator.”

J’onn nodded and walked down from the group. One of the mers made a face. He had dark skin a similar colour to Clark's, and short black hair. “Wait. Is that not Jericho?”

Slade smirked up at him. “So Timmy told you about me and my boys, huh?”

“Yeah, he said his uncle and cousins were gonna come save us, and that if Hadal comes in with you to remember that it’s not actually him.” The blond mer shivered. “Still doesn’t make looking at his ugly face any easier…”

“Yeah, well, that would be the case, but my friend here got me a Martian instead.” He jerked his head towards Clark. “Speaking of, meet Clark Kent, he’s Superman.”

Clark felt his cheeks grow warm, but otherwise didn’t complain about the introduction. “Nice to meet y’all.”

“Superman?” The blonde mer said, her eyes blowing wide. “Wow, I've heard about you!” She waved her hand. “I’m Steph, this is Cass--” she bumped shoulders with the quiet mer beside her, “and this is Duke,” she said as she bumped into the mer on the other side. “You already know Jaime and Tim.”

“Yeah.” Clark said as he eyed all the mers. Unable to tear his eyes away from Jaime in particular. “You, uh, need us to do anything, Slade?”

Slade, focused as he was on Tim, didn’t even register Clark’s question until Clark approached him and prodded his head. Once he did, Slade jerked his head to the side. “Get the mers to the elevator. You’re all strong, grab one and go.”

“Grab one and..?” Clark began to ask but the rest of his team were already coming forward and reaching out for the mers in the tanks. One by one they were plunked until the only one Clark didn’t want to handle was left. He approached Jaime gingerly, and lifted him from the tank. He was surprisingly light.

He turned with Jaime in his arms and eyed Slade still busily working on Tim’s neck. The mer in question was barely awake now, his eyes fluttering as he shivered on the floor. Slade however remained steadfast, picking at the silicone strings attached to the gills and easing them off one by one. He glanced up at Clark when he noticed him staring. “Take him to the elevator, i’ll be there in a second.”

Clark walked away, and as he did he felt the mer in his arms curl himself tighter around his neck. “Thank you.” He whispered.

“You’re welcome.” He whispered back. Once at the elevator, he found the rest of the group all waiting. J’onn had already opened the doors and they were all standing within. He had expected Slade to take a while, but after another minute he came into the elevator carrying Tim. The gill was still attached at one side, and when they were in the elevator, Slade set him back down on the ground and resumed his efforts.

J’onn started the elevator, and slowly, the platform they stood on rose. Unlike a normal elevator, when you looked up you could see the cavernous space above, and right at the top of it was the slab of concrete that Clark had to assume would slide out of the way as they approached, otherwise, this was going to be a good demonstration of supers versus concrete.

For the most part everyone was quiet as they rose. The only sounds that filled the space were Slade's quiet mutterings as he worked on Tim. Everyone watched on, until eventually Steph asked, “is he going to be okay?”

Unlike when Clark asked him a question, Slade responded almost immediately to the enquiry. His voice gentle. “Yeah, he’ll be fine, I just need to get the gill off him. Once we’re on the sub, we’ll get yours off too.”

“Is it hard?” Kon asked, readjusting Duke in his arms. “Like, can we help, or…?”

“Kind of you to offer, but no. Iron gills are tricky, only experienced individuals can remove them.”

“Oh, okay, just checking.” Kon responded.

"It's just... I don't think its the gill causing him trouble." Steph said with a wince. "It's been a while since our last injection..."

Slade nodded. “Which is why we're also gonna give y'all some morphine on the sub. Once you’re

with Leslie, she'll start you on a proper detox programme, but for now, if any of you are struggling with withdrawal we have a small supply of morphine to get you through the next few hours, at least."

They were coming near to the top, and slowly, the concrete floor slid to the side. When they reached the surface, the platform was flush with the floor, and the doorway outside was right there. However, just like anything that looked easy here, of course they couldn't just open it. J'onn approached the camera next to the doorway, and after another spoken phrase, it opened and they made their way outside. It was somewhat of a hike to get back to the other side of the island and after growing just a touch impatient, Clark as well as everyone else who could fly, did so.

By the time Clark landed, Diana, Kon and Kara were right there beside him. He nearly went back for Slade and Tim himself, but just then, he saw J'onn, carrying the pair with ease, now back in his usual form. He landed and Slade only offered an appreciative nod at them all before heading inside.

Clark followed after, and despite the perceived hard part being over, he couldn't help but dwell on everything still before them.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter done. I won't lie, my motivation took a big hit this month. I don't really know why, but at least it was only a month between updates and not, say, nine.

As always, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Let me know you're thoughts and I will see you all next time. Take care x

Chapter 38

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: This chapter briefly talks about miscarriage.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chaotic.

That was the best way to describe the submarine upon their return.

Clark for the most part did what he usually did in situations where he didn't know how to help; he just sort of stood there.

Well, technically he sat there. Bruce was now awake in the tank, but as Tim and the other mers were getting their iron gills removed in another section of the sub, Clark was left to deal with Bruce's swimming to and fro as he quietly fretted over Tim.

Clark did his best to reassure him that he'd be fine. That they would all be fine, but really, he was simply spouting the kind of words anyone would offer in this sort of situation. Those quiet reassurances that had no actual backing and served only in making those who said them and those who heard them feel better.

Eventually those reassurances paid off as news reached them of the mer's status. Everyone had responded well to the morphine injection, and the iron gills were off.

Yet, despite the good news, Bruce was still fretting. Hence why Clark thought it best to not bring up what was currently occupying his mind.

Jaime.

He wanted to believe it was a coincidence.

‘ Yeah, just like how you thought it was a ‘coincidence’ that Dick and Bruce looked alike and look how that turned out.’

And that was it; he couldn’t decide on what side of the fence he stood. Whether it was a coincidence, or if somehow, they were in fact related. He knew a simple way to find out; if Marcos were indeed a mernan, Bruce would have been able to sense his sync. All he’d need to do to find out for sure, was ask.

The hiccup in that plan however, was that Bruce was currently completing what was to be his ten thousandth circling of his tank, and Clark didn’t really want to bother him with this right now. Not when he had so much already on his plate.

No, right now he had to focus on their current mission; getting the mers to Sacramento.

Slade had come to see them after news of the mers status had reached them and explained the plan. He’d stay with Bruce and Elijah on the sub and move it near to Clark’s island for the time being. The other mers would be moved in a shipping container that according to Slade was now on his boat thanks to Kon and Kara. Joey and Grant would man that boat and Clark would transport everyone else on his. They’d sail to Sacramento and once the mers were dropped off, they’d reconvene at Solitude.

Of course, despite the help they had given and continued to give, Slade made it clear that Clark’s ‘super friends’ were free to leave whenever they pleased. Clark had to wonder why they stuck around too, but conceded that they were most likely curious to know more about what Slade did, or even more likely, that they wanted to spend as much time as they could with Clark.

As they got closer to where they would split up, Clark said a quick goodbye to Bruce and Slade before leaving out of the main hatch and hopping onto his boat. Grant and Joey had already loaded up the mers onto theirs and after making sure everyone was ready, Clark started his boat followed after Grant.

He thought it would be a quiet ride over to Sacramento, but then again, he should have expected it not to be given who his passengers were. For one thing Kon and Kara took it upon themselves to explore every inch of his boat the moment they set foot onto it, including the cupboard where he had stashed the box from Sal.

He managed to get them away from it before it was opened, and after a stern word from both him and Diana the pair decided to sullenly end their exploration and sit out on the swim platform.

Victor, J'onn and Diana stayed with him in the cockpit even after Clark made it clear he was okay on his own if they wanted to enjoy the breeze outside with the others.

And that's how their journey went. By the time they reached Sacramento, even Kon and Kara had ventured inside to join them; no longer sporting petulant frowns. He spied the dockyard he usually moored in when visiting Sacramento, but saw Grant wasn't aiming for it and was instead veering further left. He followed after him, and eventually ended up in what looked like a poorly maintained dock. There were hardly any boats there, and the ones that were looked shabby to say the least. Clark wanted to comment on the state of the place, but one look at the sign on the side of the shipping office helped answer some of his questions at least.

The sign read 'WINTERGREEN SHIPPING', and after pulling into one of the vacant spots he turned to his team and quickly realized that there was a problem. "Ah." He let out.

"What is it?" Diana asked, looking to the rest of them as though the answer was there. It was, but Diana didn't seem to see it as Clark had.

"You're clothes." Clark said as he gestured to them all. "You're all still in 'super' gear."

"Oh." They all let out in unison. Well, everyone aside from J'onn who simply morphed into a humanoid man, replete with casual clothing upon the revelation. Kon rolled his eyes at the display before marching off into the small bedroom onboard. "Okay, well everyone who isn't a Martian, grab some of Clark's clothes."

"Wait, hold on now--" but Clark didn't manage to finish the sentence, before Kon was returning holding a bundle of clothes that he now dumped onto the floor.

Despite the side glances he got about the amount, and the quality of it all, they managed to use what little Clark had onboard to make their uniforms look less obvious. Kara wore one of his shirts with a belt, Kon simply zipped up his leather jacket and borrowed some of Clark's pants. Diana took two shirts; the looser one she fashioned around her waist, and the smaller one she wore normally and Victor, upon seeing what was on offer, voiced that he'd just stay on the boat.

The end result was nothing to write home about. The best way Clark could describe it was that they looked like a group of people that had woken up naked somewhere and were trying to make do with whatever clothing they could find. Despite that, he did have to concede that it was a better alternative to looking like superheroes.

They stepped off the boat, and found Grant and Joey already outside. Grant's eyes slid up and down all of them before he sent an amused look Clark's way. "You know, we had clothes on our boat."

Clark made a face. "That would have been helpful to know *before* they raided by wardrobe."

"Ah, well," Grant shrugged. "Not like there are many people here."

"I was gonna say." Clark said as he cast another look around the empty boardwalk. "This place looks deserted."

"Exactly. The main docks are just over there, and we don't do business with other people so this place is always quiet. Makes moving mers through here a lot easier."

"But Leslie's clinic is all the way in the city centre." Clark said, throwing his thumb over his shoulder. "How are you planning on getting the mers there? In a truck?"

Grant however, didn't answer, instead gesturing towards the shipping office. "Just go in there and wait for us."

Clark watched as he approached the large crane on the dock and then turned his attention to the shipping container on the rear of the boat. Despite its sleek design, the container fit perfectly onboard, as though it were built for it. Whilst he was already looking, he took a quick peek in the container itself and found the mers inside it were fine if a little shaken from the journey.

He waited to see if Grant or Joey would say anything else, and when they didn't, he followed Grant's suggestion and stepped inside the shipping office.

The moment he pushed upon the door, he heard a voice. "We don't serve ugly people. Get out."

Clark hadn’t even had a chance to get a proper look inside the place before he found himself frowning towards the person at the front desk. He was about to respond, but the moment he saw a shock of white hair and green eyes that looked all too familiar, he raised a brow. “Is your name… 'Rose' by any chance?”

The girl at the counter looked at him blankly, her expression not once shifting to anything other than disinterested. “Rose died four years ago.”

That is Slade and Selina’s child, alright. “Did she now.” Clark said easily as he stepped inside, allowing the rest of his team to follow him. Once they were all in, the girl's brow quirked up in what Clark had to assume was her equivalent of a frown.

“What part of not serving ugly people did you guys not understand? Get out before I call the police.”

This time, Kon responded. “*Hey*. My dad said I'm very handsome.”

“He lied to you.” She deadpanned.

Kon marched forward, hands raised, but was stopped by Clark’s arm jutting out to the side. “Look, Rose. I am a friend of your fathers. Your brothers are just outside. We’re here to help.”

Rose’s expression however, didn’t move an inch. “I don’t have any brothers.”

Clark let out a sigh. “Okay, I tried.” He approached the sofa in the room and fell against it. “We’re just gonna wait here until Grant and Joey are done, alright?”

Despite her earlier comments, Rose was quiet as they all waited inside. After a moment, she pulled out her phone and typed away on it, and as she did, the doorbell chimed.

It wasn't, however, who they were expecting.

An older looking man entered. He sent them a polite smile before wiping his head and approached the front desk. “Excuse me, Miss--”

“We don’t serve bald people here.” Rose said as she slowly slid her eyes up towards him.

The man’s face immediately fell as his cheeks grew red. “I beg your pardon--”

Rose pointed at the front door. “Try the main docks; I hear they have a whole team dedicated to helping those in need of toupée’s.”

The man turned to look at them all, but perhaps sensing that none of them were going to say anything, he turned back to Rose with a tight frown. “Why I never, you will regret this young lady. I was going to give you--”

“Give me what? Some of your flop sweat? Yeah, I'm good. Now get out. I can smell you from here.” She said, without a shred of insincerity.

The man stormed out, slamming the door shut behind him for good measure. Rose yawned as she went back to looking at her phone.

“What the Hell?” Kara asked under her breath.

The next time the door chime went, Grant entered with Joey beside him. “Hey, Rosie.”

For the first time, Rose's expression changed drastically; a scowl forming on her lips. “Go die.”

“Aw, Rosie, always so sweet. I trust you gave our friends here the ‘Wintergreen’ treatment.” Grant said sweetly as turned to them a winked.

“‘Wintergreen’ treatment?” Kara asked.

Grant nodded. “Yeah. Our shipping business is a front so in order to ensure we don’t get actual customers we have Rosie here to make sure that no person in their right mind would wanna do business with us.”

“Is that why you insulted that man?” Diana asked, raising a brow.

“No, I just really hate bald people.” Rose mumbled as she turned her attention back to her phone.

“I did wonder what was gonna happen with that guy when I saw him pull in.” Grant said as he crossed his arms. “Good to know our little Rosie is still good at repelling anyone who dares come in through that door.”

“You still got inside.” She muttered.

Grant, ignoring that comment, asked. “Is Wintergreen here?”

“No.”

He raised an eyebrow, and not even five seconds later a door behind Rose opened and an older looking man poked his head out. “I thought I heard you.” The man stepped out and past the front desk towards Grant, he opened his arms and hugged him and Joey. “Good to see you boys.”

“Good to see you too, Will.” Grant turned and gestured towards Clark and company. “This is Clark and his ‘superfriends’.”

“Right right. I was talking with, who was it again, Victor?” He looked at them all expectantly.

“Uh, Victor’s still out on the boat.” Clark said, gesturing towards the door. “He’s not as… conspicuous as the rest of us.”

Wintergreen nodded slowly. “I mean, I would say the place is quiet enough for that not to matter, but on occasion we get someone or another coming in. You’d think word would have gotten around by now that our customer service is lacking, but apparently not.” He shrugged. “Well, when you see him,

let him know I said thanks.” He smiled and turned to Rose, clapping his hands together. “Well then, Rose, are you ready to do some actual work?”

“No.”

“Attagirl.” He turned to Clark as he set his hand on her shoulder. “Rose is gonna take you all to the tunnel. Grant and I will meet you down there.”

Before Clark could get any clarification, Wintergreen left with Grant in tow, leaving Joey with them. He looked at Rose, and this time, her face didn’t read of annoyance, returning to what Clark had to assume was her default, painfully blank, expression. She let out a long sigh and stood up. “Fine, you uggos follow me.”

“I don’t like how she keeps calling us ugly.” Kon muttered to Kara, who only hummed in agreement.

They followed after her, and eventually ended up at an elevator that looked as though it had seen better days. She pressed a code into the pad beside it, and the doors opened. She and Joey stepped inside, and when no one else moved she let out a harsh sigh. “Get in already."

They did just that, and once they were inside, Rose typed in another code and the door slid shut. They then started to descend.

After a minute, they stopped and the door opened to reveal a barely illuminated tunnel. They stepped out into it, and Clark realized that there were train tracks underneath his feet. He turned to the left and then right, listening for the sound of oncoming trains. When he concluded there were none, at least for now, he allowed himself to feel less on edge.

They stood there waiting for a little while longer, and eventually Clark heard something off to his left. It was another elevator, this one all the way at the end of the tunnel. He looked in that direction, and when he did, he saw Grant and Wintergreen in it beside the shipping container.

Once the elevator came to a stop, the doors opened and both men pushed the container out down a ramp. It was on a wheeled base, and when it hit the tracks, it slotted into place. Wintergreen then bent over, and upon pressing something on the side of the base, the container began to move, albeit slowly, towards them.

After a few minutes they were now in front of them, with Grant sending him a quick flash of a smile Clark's way. "Beats driving," he said with a wink.

Clark fell instep beside him, looking around the tunnel as they went deeper into it. "Did you guys build this?" He asked, his disbelief apparent.

"No." Grant said and at Clark's raised eyebrow, he went on. "A few years back, the city's underground transport system was in dire need of updating. It only had a handful of lines and stops and as Sacramento's population grew, it was getting overwhelmed. Wintergreen managed to get a hold of the proposed plans and saw one of the lines they were planning went from the docks straight into the city centre. Dad and Wintergreen saw an opportunity, and after blackmailing slash bribing the city planners, they got them to 'abandon' this line after they'd already dug out and laid the tracks for it. The official statement was that the earth was too unstable to support the trains, and only us and a few planners know the truth. After that, Wintergreen brought what was going to be the subway station at the docks and turned it into his shipping office, and dad brought what was going to be the station in the city centre, and gave it to Leslie who turned it into her pharmacy slash clinic."

"So no trains actually come through here?" Clark asked, still keeping an ear out.

"Nope." Grant said. "The planners built the other tunnels around this line. No trains have ever come through here."

"Handy." Clark said with a nod.

After ten minutes of walking they reached the other end of the tunnel. Grant and Wintergreen loaded the container into the goods lift and Clark joined Rose and everyone else in the other.

The elevator rose, and in less than a minute, the doors opened and Clark looked around at the room before him.

It was not at all what he was expecting.

When Clark looked up, he could see the bustling streets of Sacramento above him, as well as the pharmacy he had visited all those months ago. The room he was in now though, was vast, and despite

being underground, had walls that were tall and painted to look like a shore line with the top blending seamlessly into the pale blue of the ceiling. The floor was coloured like sand, and the tanks were dug into the ground, with actual sand lining the edges. Underwater tunnels connected the tanks together and each were filled with fish, sand as well as vegetation. Off in one corner were computer screens as well as a few pieces of medical equipment but every other part of the room looked much like a beach resort, or even a spa might.

As they stepped further into the room, the other set of elevator doors opened up and without even sliding the container out, Grant simply opened the front of it.

In a flurry of movement, water as well as the mers inside slid out in a torrent, but as though anticipating that, they all slid across the tiles into the waiting tanks of water with ease, immediately swimming between the vast tanks through the tunnels.

Wintergreen shut the container door as Grant approached them. “What do you think?”

“This place is incredible.” Diana voiced for all of them. “It’s hard to believe something so spacious is underneath a city.”

“It's like a spa.” Kara said quietly, approaching the edge of one of the tanks and looking into it. “A spa slash pool slash aquarium.” She paused. “A spapoolquarium, if you will.”

Grant smiled. “That's sort of what we’re going for.” He said, looking out across the room. “Most if not all the mers that come here have been in captivity and the last thing we want for them to have to deal with is being stuck in the same kind of place they were being held captive in. We wanted to make it feel as though you’re out in the open.”

“Well, you definitely nailed it.” Clark said, letting out an appreciative hum.

“Thanks.” Grant said as he began to walk across the room towards the doorway all the way on the other side. “I’m gonna go grab Leslie, she should be--”

But he paused upon hearing footsteps. After a moment, a small elderly woman came in, setting her hands on her hips as she regarded them all. She didn’t yell out to them from across the way, and instead walked slowly across the room, her shoes clicking against the tiles as she did. She eventually

came to a stop beside Grant and smiled at them all. “Welcome, folks.” She brought her hand to her chest. “I am Leslie Tompkins, but I trust you all already know that.”

After receiving a smattering of nods and quiet hellos from everyone, Leslie turned to Grant. Her expression turning serious. “How many?”

“Five.”

“Condition?”

“Tim seems the worst off; the others seem to be handling withdrawal better.”

“Does Selina know he’s here?”

“She’s on her way over now.”

“Wonderful.” Leslie let out. “I better pull out the cot for her; she won’t be leaving his side any time soon.”

“I can try talking to her.”

Leslie however, only smiled. “Right. Talk a mother out of watching over her baby. Let me know how that goes for you.” She then shook her head, peering into the tanks. “Where is Bruce?”

“Still in the tank, he’s got another twenty or so hours of depressurising.”

“*Twenty* ?” She mumbled and despite her best attempts to school her expression, her lips twitch downward. “I see.”

A creeping feeling of deja vu washed over Clark. Despite the things he was hearing being new to him,

he had an unerring feeling he had heard it all before. That was confirmed when he felt J'onn's gentle touch on his back, and in a flash, images of Bruce in the tank flooded his mind. That, combined with Leslie's grim expression caused the following words to spill from his mouth. "Is he gonna be okay?"

Leslie turned to him, her eyes widening as though it were the first time she was truly looking at him. At his face, her eyes softened. "I take it you must be Clark?"

His stomach dropped. "Is he gonna be okay?" He repeated.

Leslie let out a breath. "He will be fine, he's a deep sea mer and should the depressurising go smoothly, he won't suffer any ill effects."

His jaw twitched. "Why do I feel like there's a 'but' coming?"

Leslie kept her mouth closed.

Clark's stare however, only grew more intense.

She let out a sigh, crossing her arms. "The issue is that he's pregnant. Whilst *he* can handle the depressurising, the fetus can still experience decompression sickness, and that can cause malformation or even an embolism. There is a risk he might miscarry."

Clark doesn't recall much after that. There was a presence beside him, Diana if he had to guess. He knew she was calling out his name, but her voice was like a distant echo; her touch like air. He simply stared at the floor, and with each blink he realized he was getting lower and lower to the ground until finally his knees were on the floor. Diana's voice grew louder, though never seemed to puncture the apparent wall now surrounding him.

Slowly, the world began to return to him. It started with the cool feeling of the tiles underneath his hands, and once he could feel that, he turned his head towards Diana and saw the worry etched onto her face as she rubbed his back in firm circles. He could hear words being passed around him but he couldn't make any of them out.

Eventually, he noticed someone approaching him, and before knew it, Leslie's face was right there in front of him, a fierce look in her eyes. "Those babies are going to be fine, got it?"

Clark could hardly moved. The only thing holding him up right now was the firm grip of Leslie on his jaw.

"I have dealt with far worse here. Once Bruce gets out of that tank, I'm not going to let him leave until I can say without a shadow of a doubt that those babies are gonna live." She reached for his face, holding it steady. In that moment, he let out a choked breath. "They are gonna be fine. They got Superman for a dad, after all."

Clark laughed at that, but the tears made it come out like a hiccup. Leslie pulled back and he felt Diana's hand tighten on his arm as she helped him to stand back up, he wiped his face and eyed the woman before him. "What gave me away?"

Leslie smirked. "Slade told me."

"Right. Should have known." He took a deep breath and turned to Diana. "Thanks."

"Are you okay?" She asked, her brows still furrowed together. "Do you need a moment--"

"Nah." he said, waving his hand. "It's just a lot. The stress of today, and then hearing *that* , yeah--" he swallowed thickly. "But I'm okay now."

Diana didn't look convinced. Nor did anyone else in the room. He had a feeling Grant and Joey were saying as much to Leslie if the looks they were sharing were anything to go by but as Clark couldn't hear it, he chose to ignore it.

Despite his posturing he did at least listen to Diana when she told him to go sit down. His legs weren't feeling all too strong, and the moment he sat down on one of the benches lining the side he took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

'*They're going to be fine* .' He told himself. '*You're Superman. Your babies are gonna be fine* .'

‘*You thought the same thing last time . Remind me again; what happened to Jon?* ’

Clark lurched forward, certain something was going to come out but as he stared at the tiling all that did were a few dribbles of saliva. ‘*Don’t think about that. Don’t do it. Not now* .’

He had hoped no one was paying attention to him, but then he felt someone slide in beside him. “Clark?”

He managed to turn his head by a fraction and spy Kara's mass of blonde curls close by. “Hey.” He managed, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Look. I know you’re not okay.” She said softly. “And that’s okay. You know that, right?”

Clark smiled. “Kara, I’m--”

“Don’t say 'fine'.” She urged, leaning forward. “I can’t even imagine what you’re feeling right now, but you need to know it's okay that you’re not fine. This is a lot for anyone to handle. Especially you.”

Clark looked away. “It isn’t a big deal. Leslie’s right, they’re gonna be fine. I mean, she probably just told me that to calm me down, but it’s fine. I’m just overthinking it...”

“Leslie didn’t just say that to placate you, alright?” Kara said softly. “You were probably too out of it to check, but I monitored her heartbeat and sweat glands when she said all that, and neither changed. She was telling you the truth, Clark.”

Surprisingly, that did ease Clark's mind significantly as he turned towards her. “She was?”

Kara nodded emphatically. “Yup. We were all talking to her before I came over. She’s been doing this for *years*, Clark. She knows everything about mers, especially deep sea ones. When Bruce gets out of

that tank, he is going to be in the best hands possible. Your *babies* are gonna be in the best hands possible."

This time when Clark smiled, there was nothing forced about it, he leant over, resting his head against Kara's. "Thanks, Kara."

"You're welcome." She murmured, her hand rubbing circles into his back.

They remained like this as everyone else went about their business. Leslie was talking with the others as Diana and J'onn looked around the room. Kon was standing by one of the tanks, looking down into it with quiet awe.

It was as Clark pulled his attention away from Kon and allowed the soothing feeling of Kara's hand on his back to wash over him, that he starkly realized what he needed to say. What he had been needing to say for a while. "I'm sorry."

Kara must have been distracted as well, as it took her a moment to turn to Clark, her eyebrows furrowed together. "For what?"

"I should have tried to keep in touch with you and Kon. You're my family. My *only* family, and I didn't even try to see you guys once over the past four years. Not even *once*." He turned to her, his eyes threatened to water once more. "And yet, here you both are, acting like everything's fine, like nothing is wrong, like I deserved even a shred of the kindness you giving me right now, I just--"

He felt a sharp pain in the back of his head, and when he turned to Kara, he saw her palm held up to the back of it. Her eyes were filled with fury as she spoke. "Don't you *ever* say that." She brought her hand back down, but her eyes still remained fixed on him. "You didn't do anything wrong. I know Diana got on you for ignoring the rest of the world, for not wanting to see anyone, but I understood."

She took a deep breath. "Do you remember when I first landed on Earth? I didn't want to deal with anybody. Much less you. I was still processing the fact that Krypton was gone, that my only living family was my baby cousin who was now *older* than me. I just kept running away and hiding, and even when I hit you, got mad at you, you *always* came and found me. You convinced me everything was going to be okay, that you were there for me, and even though I hated you for it at the time, I was so thankful you did it. I was thankful that you introduced me to Diana and the Justice League, that you let me stay with you and Lois until I could figure things out."

“Yet, I didn’t do that for you…” She whispered. “Not even once.”

She wiped her eyes and let out a quiet sob. “That’s why I was mad at Slade. I didn’t care that you didn’t talk about us to him or anyone else. I didn’t expect you to. But when he said that, it just reminded me that whilst you had a reason to want to be alone, I didn't have any reason for *leaving* you on your own.”

Clark reached for her hand, taking in hers. “Kara, please. I was an asshole to Diana every time she came to see me. Just ask her.”

“But we’re *family*.” She sniffled. “I should have made more of an effort, I should have gone with Diana when she visited you. I should have done what you did for me. But I didn’t. I had no reason not to, and yet, I didn’t.”

Clark nodded slowly. “I mean you had one,” he began, offering the faintest of smiles. “My house is a shit hole. The moment you would have set foot inside, the smell alone would have knocked you out.”

Kara let out a laugh, though the movement of it caused another tear drop from her eye. She still smiled all the same. “True, Diana would always tell us how awful your ‘island retreat’ was.”

“You’ll get to see it for yourself soon enough, you know.” Clark winked.

“Can’t wait.” She said earnestly, her smile still in place. She wiped her face, and looked at him. “I mean it though, Clark, I'm sorry for leaving you alone. Kon is too. He probably won't say it, because Kon has the emotional capabilities of a walnut, but he is.”

“Thanks, Kara.” He said, smiling back, “and I am also sorry, for what it's worth.”

“Apology accepted.” She said with a crisp nod before standing. “We better get moving, Leslie wants to give all the mers a once over and thinks it's best if we all get out of the way.”

After collecting Kon from where he had become rooted at the edge of the tank, they all left the way they had come up. Leslie waved them off, and once they were back underground, Clark ended up next to Diana, who bumped against his shoulder with her own. “Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah.” Clark answered, offering a nod. “I do.”

“Good.” Diana said, setting her hand on his back. “I was worried; you had that same look in your eyes as you had with Lois. On the beach--”

Sand in the rain, blood on his hands, Diana’s quiet voice calling out; “Clark, what have you done?”

Clark’s knees gave way and this time when his mouth fell open, it was more than saliva that left his body.

“Clark!” Diana called out, immediately crouched down at his side. “Are you--”

“*Don’t* .” Clark choked out, his eyes wide as he slowly turned to her. “Don’t mention that day. *Ever*. Again.”

“I’m sorry.” Diana said quickly, her eyes frantic. Everyone else had stopped, and as though feeling everyone's eyes on him like they were physical presence, Clark lumbered onto his feet and marched onward, ignoring how his legs ached as he practically ran.

Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it.

As he reached the other end, he wished he wasn’t underground. He wanted to fly off; to find Bruce, to stay with him until he was out of that God forsaken tank, but as it stood, he was deep underground with an elevator he didn’t know how to operate blocking his way. He had no choice but to wait for everyone else to join him.

It did take a few minutes for everyone to reach him; minutes he used to compose himself. Eventually he saw everyone come into view, the first of which was Kara who tucked in beside him like a puppy might and with only that, he felt better.

Despite what he had been telling himself over the years, he really couldn't deny how much better having other people around felt.

Rose took them back up, and after several quick goodbyes, Clark made his way to his boat as Grant and Joey went towards theirs.

After climbing on board, he found Victor inside, typing away on a small digital screen that hovered above his forearm. He turned to him and gave a nod. "Did everything go okay?"

"Yup." Clark said simply, not elaborating further as he went to the cockpit to start up the boat. He knew Diana would fill Victor in when he wasn't there, and really, that's what Clark wanted. To not be present when any discussion about him occurred.

The two boats sailed off towards Solitude, and perhaps sensing Clark was not in a talking mood, everyone left him alone in the cockpit, keeping conversation to a minimum out on the swim deck as Clark drove.

As Clark approached his island, he saw the top of the submarine poking up from the water nearby. He pulled up the dock as Grant sailed straight past him towards the sub.

By the time he had come to a complete stop and hopped out onto the dock, he found everyone already there waiting, sans his clothes, thankfully.

Kon was walking along the sand towards his home. "Is that your house?" He asked as he pointed towards the literal only building in sight.

Fighting the urge to respond sarcastically, Clark simply nodded. "Yeah."

As if that was all they needed, everyone headed towards it, though their curiosity was soon sated when they poked their heads inside and saw there wasn't much to snoop through. Kara was the first to turn to Clark, shaking her head. "Yeah, no offense, but it really is a shit hole."

“I would ask you all inside for coffee, but as you can see--” he gestured to the tiny room. “I can't.”

“We should be heading off now, anyway.” Diana said as she turned her face away from the state of Clark's home. She looked at him briefly, though couldn’t hold his gaze. “I’ll come check on you in a few days, but until then, take care.”

“Will do.” Clark said as he regarded them all. “Thanks again for your help guys, I really don’t know what I would have done without you.”

“It’s chill.” Kon said with a wave of the hand. “You can just make me the Godfather of your babies, and we’ll be even.”

“Please, like Clark, would ever make *you* a Godparent. You don’t even know how to boil an egg.” Kara said with a roll of the eyes.

“I didn’t realize cooking eggs and taking care of babies were mutually exclusive.” Kon quipped.

Before Kara could respond, Clark held up his hands, a tired smile on his face. “Guys, I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but I really don’t want to think about babies, or Godparents right now.”

Kara’s expression softened as she came forward and hugged him. “Alright Clark, like Diana said, we’ll come check in on you in a few days.” She pulled back and smiled. “See you then.”

One by one he received either a hug or a firm pat on the shoulder as they left, until it was only Diana who remained, whose sombre expression told Clark exactly what she wanted to say. So he beat her to it. “It’s fine, Diana. Just don’t bring it up again, okay?”

“Of course.” She said, though Clark was well aware that wasn’t the end of it. Diana had a habit of tugging at every thread Clark’s psyche had. It was what caused him to lash out at her, and despite knowing she meant well, it didn’t stop the pain each tug caused.

They soon flew off, and once he was alone, he flew over to the submarine, and found the hatchway already open for him. He stepped inside and found Slade, Grant and Joey with Bruce. They were

syncing with one another, as Clark heard glimpses of it as he approached, though they immediately stopped when he came into view. Bruce looked at him, tilting his head. '~~*Are you okay*~~?'

Clark wondered what he had been told, but elected not to find out. He only nodded. "Yeah, are you?"

Bruce nodded

"Does your stomach feel fine?"

Another nod.

Clark smiled. "Good." He sat down on his chair beside the tank, and let his head rest against the glass. "Good…" he repeated quietly.

Slade and the others must have left soon after as before he knew it, he was alone with Bruce, and then not long after that, he fell asleep to the sound of Bruce's gentle humming.

He'll be fine. The babies will be fine. Just don't think about it. Don't think about that day.

~~*Don't think about what you did.*~~

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed this chapter.

As always, let me know your thoughts. Catch you all next time x

Chapter 39

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was an eel swimming through the molluscs beside him. It bumped up against Clark's thigh, and began to bite at his swim trunks, before apparently giving up and swimming away.

He was by the lake again, but this time, the thing was lounging beside him, no longer afraid of his presence it seemed. It batted it's tail against the misty surface as it quietly thought.

'Wh/at sor/t of fo0d/do you have up/there?' It asked.

Clark looked away from the slowly retreating eel and turned to the thing. He thought for a while. 'Lots of stuff. We have loads of animals that we eat up there. Like cow and chicken. But we also make stuff, too. Out of other things.'

'You make it?'

'Yeah, like we don't just eat things raw like you guys. We take things and put them together to make things like pie, cake or chocolate.'

The things ears pricked up. 'Ch0c0late?'

'Yeah.' Clark nods. 'It's this sweet, creamy candy. My mama never lets me have it 'cause she thinks it'll make me fat, but I usually manage to eat some on the way home from school. I just gotta make sure she doesn't find out.' He still remembers the time she had found an empty Mars bar wrapper in his school trousers. It had been no dessert for a week. Clark shuddered at the memory.

The thing looked at him, its eyes wide. 'We don't h/ave any/thing/g like that d0wn here/. S0metimes we g/et to e/at wha/e//b/ut usually it/'s just fish/or e/els.' The thing made a face. 'Or sea/we/ed. My m0th/er m/akes m/e e/at it/as she/s/ays its good f0r me.'

Clark held his gaze. 'I could bring you some, you know. Next time I'm down.' As he looked up towards where he knew the surface laid, he grew pensive. 'I just gotta remember.'

The thing hummed.

'At least I remember to come back down to see you.' Clark offered with a smile.

'~~Yeah~~.' The thing smiled back. '~~Yøu dø.~~'

October 15th 2016

"Clark."

He awoke with a start, his mind scrambling to remember where he was as he looked around. *Lake? No. Apartment? No. Cabin? No.* In the end, it took staring up at Slade's grim expression to remind himself where exactly he was and more importantly, why. "What is it, Slade?" He asked as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"I need to talk to you." The man said curtly. "Joey'll keep an eye on Bruce."

Right. Tank. Clark thought as he looked to his side and found Bruce right where he had left him; asleep in the tank. He took in his face, barely visible from where it was resting on his folded arms. He still looked strange, but at least he was returning somewhat back to normal. He turned his attention back to Slade and jerked his head towards the small console on the tank. "How many more hours has he got?"

"About thirteen." Slade said as he turned to leave. "You coming?"

Clark felt as though he didn’t have a choice in the matter and as Joey entered the room and stood beside the chair he was sitting on, that thought was confirmed. He got up and followed after Slade.

They walked through the sub before making their way to what appeared to be Hadal’s study. It looked out of place compared to the rest of the submarine, with its wood panelled floor and oak furnishings. It was so different from what Clark had been expecting in fact, that he found himself standing at the doorway, just trying to take it all in. Slade however didn't even pause as he approached the desk and sat down before gesturing for Clark to do the same.

Clark walked to the chair in front of the desk, and perhaps it was the décor or the look on Slade's face but in that moment Clark felt as though he had been transported straight back to his high school principal's office; right down to his rapidly quickening pulse and now damp neck.

He slowly lowered himself into the chair. “What did you want to talk to me about?” He prompted when it was clear Slade wasn’t going to say anything. He simply sat there, watching Clark like he were a particularly curious fish at the aquarium.

“How are you?” He eventually asked, his eye remaining fixed on him.

Clark made a face at the question. He thought about it, and when he decided he didn’t want to think about it anymore, he shrugged. “Fine.”

“Fine?” Slade repeated, his brow raising. “That’s not what I heard.”

And just like that, Clark looked away, unable to handle Slade's unwavering stare anymore. “I don’t really care what you were told. I’m telling you, I'm fine.”

“Right.” Slade said as he leant back into the chair, nodding slowly. “Panic attacks are just a part of everyday life.”

“They are for me.” Clark muttered.

Slade's eye narrowed. "You're your own worst enemy, you know that right? Any normal person would see they need help if they did what I'm told you did, but not you. Not '*Superman* '."

Clark feels his anger flare, like a fire warm in his belly. He took a deep breath. "I *want* help." He managed to get out through clenched teeth. "I'm going to get help, okay? I have a friend. She's a professional. She's…" He looked away. "She's gonna help."

"I'll believe it when I see it." Was Slade's response to that as he eyed Clark warily.

"Look, can we just talk about something else?" Clark didn't so much ask, but plead.

For a moment, Clark doubted Slade would fold that easily. For one, Clark had a feeling that simply requesting a change of conversation wouldn't be enough for Slade to move on if he didn't want to. He hoped it would be though, mostly as he didn't know if he were even capable of getting into the state his mind was currently in. His dreams were strange, his thoughts bleak. He knew he needed to unpack it all, to finally deal with the festering pile of garbage that was his mental health, but told himself that Bruce was his priority at the moment.

He would just need to wait.

He had to assume Slade agreed with that sentiment, as he didn't keep pressing like Clark half expected him to and instead lowered his gaze to what was sitting before him on the desk. "I found Hadal's letters."

Clark couldn't help but pull back in surprise. Despite the tone of their previous conversation still lingering in the air, from that single sentence it was as though all of it had vanished. "You did?" He asked, his eyes immediately going to the stack of paper.

"Yup." Slade said quietly as he slowly slid his hand across the stack, as though stroking it. Despite not being able to read any of the words written, Clark felt his heart race at the simple possibility of what could be there.

“May I?” He asked, holding his hand out.

Slade however, didn’t move. Keeping his hand where it was resting on top of the stake. “On one condition; you do not repeat any of what we are about to talk about to Bruce.”

Clark frowned, his hand faltering. “Why?”

“No.” Slade shook his head. “I need you to promise me that you won’t repeat what I am about to tell you to Bruce. Until you promise me that, I'm not saying anything else.”

Clark let out a huff. “But what if--”

“*No* .” Slade snapped, his jaw tightening. “You either promise, or you get out.”

Clark had heard a lot of unreasonable requests in his time, and yet despite how simple this one was, Clark couldn’t help but see it as near impossible. “Look. I can’t just hide something from Bruce. If it's important, he has a right to know.”

“You’re right, he does." Slade said with a single nod, his hand twitching on the paper. “Just not right now. Not whilst he's in that tank.”

That at least did something to cause Clark's frown to lessen, though being reminded of his partner's current predicament only succeeded in renewing Clark's earlier feelings of nausea. “Right.” He muttered. “Then I guess I promise to not tell him. For now.”

Slade’s lip slipped between his teeth as he nodded and slid the piece of paper lying on the top of the stack over to Clark. “Read.” He stated.

And Clark did just that, taking the paper and scanning over its contents. He didn’t know what he expected but by the time he was finished, he realized he had stopped breathing.

October 11th 2016

Dear, Jack.

Today I had the pleasure of examining the new black fin I acquired. Lovely colouring, though his hands are sadly humanoid. I introduced him to the others, and I am happy to say they responded well. I think you'd be rather fond of him too, Jack. He has such lovely, pale skin, and such beautiful, blue eyes that for a moment I wondered if he might be from the same pod as your 'Nightingale'.

Which leads me to my next topic. I know I have requested it before, numerous times even, to the point where your letters have become monosyllabic, but I am once again requesting to see your mers in person. Whilst the photos you sent me years ago were absolutely extraordinary, seeing them in person is another experience all together, as I am sure you can agree.

It would also allow me to confirm several theories I have. I know I have bored you with them before, but I really do ask that you x-ray their stomachs in search of a primordial womb. If they have one Jack, just think! You'd be able to breed countless abyssal fins, and what's more, any you don't like the look of I would happily take off your hands! I don't know which of the two would become the broodmother; whilst Robin is bigger, Nightingale appears to be the purer of the two. If I didn't have the photo to reference, I simply wouldn't believe a mer's scales could cover so much of their body. Truly extraordinary!

Now, I must be getting off. But please, let me know if I am able to visit. I would pay you whatever amount you wished, and whichever of my mers you desired, would be yours!

I will sign off as I always do by asking; yes or no, Jack. Just let me know if I can see them. That's all I need to know.

Regards, Elijah.

Clark slowly lowered the paper. He eyed Slade, taking in the man's grim expression as he spoke. "The rest of the letters are like that, but this is the most recent."

Clark swallowed thickly as he set the letter down, trying to take in what he had just read. The mer at the beginning. That must have been Tim. He reread the words, grimacing anew at each sentence. '*His hands are sadly humanoid* .' God, how he never ended up punching Hadal was a mystery.

Slade leant forward and tapped the desk emphatically. “Look at how he describes the mers, Clark.”

Clark looked back down at the paper and began rereading the words again, out loud. “Whilst Robin is bigger, Nightingale--”

“Looks like Tim and has ‘hyperscalae’." Slade finished for him without blinking. “It’s a rare mutation that affects where scales appear on a mers body. Scales are only meant to appear on a mers tail, back, ears, hands, but sometimes the gene in charge of that gets mutated and the scales can end up developing on the stomach, face, chest. Anywhere.”

Clark reread the paper, hoping to see what Slade was trying to get at. “And?” He prompted, raising a brow.

“Terry,” Slade said slowly, “has hyperscalae.”

Clark frowned for a moment, wondering how he knew that name before his eyes blew wide in shock. “You don’t think--”

“I think Napier has Damian and Terry.” Slade said. “It *has* to be them.”

“But--”

“No.” Slade said quickly. “You haven't read the other letters. ‘Cause if you did, you’d agree with me. There are other things Hadal has mentioned about them.” He closes his eye, as though the words on the papers were there instead of in the stack beside him. “‘*Robin* ’; a large mer with green eyes and dark skin; violent with any mer who isn’t…” He takes a breath. “‘*Nightingale* ’. A small, pale skinned mer with hyperscalae. The only portions of his body *not* covered in scales are his mouth and a small area on his upper chest, the *same* areas as Terry. It *has* to be them, Clark.”

Clark looked at Slade, taking in the frantic expression and felt guilt surge through his body. Whilst he had been so consumed with his own worries, he hadn't even thought about what Slade might be going through. After all, despite how much it annoyed Clark, he too cared for Bruce and what's more, was privy to the kind of information that Clark wished he didn't know. Despite how unusual their relationship was, he knew he didn't hate Slade. In fact, there were moments where he could actually see what Bruce might have seen in him. For instance, right now, there was no bravado here, no attempt to make Clark feel uncomfortable with terrible, crude jokes. He had a feeling this was the closest he was going to get to meeting the real Slade, and he hated how it took what they were currently discussing to see it.

"Is that why you don't want to tell Bruce?" Clark asked quietly. "Because you think it's them?"

"I don't *think*. I *know* ." Slade ground out, before letting out a sigh. "But, yes. That's why. With Napier being as elusive as he is, I don't want to stress Bruce out whilst he's in that tank by telling him he has his sons and has likely tortured them for his own amusement for the past four years." Slade grimaced, and Clark couldn't help but mirror the expression. "If Bruce found out; I don't even want to think about how he'd react..."

"How do you know that?" Clark asked cautiously. "That he… would have tortured them?"

"I found Napiers other letters." Slade muttered. "The stack I showed you before; the 'no' pile. Those are only the ones from last year. They started after Hadal first asked to see Napier's abyssal fins in person. Before that, Hadal did a good job of not sounding too eager to see them. Just made conversation, asking about Napier's auctions and whatever new mer he had acquired. He played the long game, trying to get close to Napier before finally asking if he could examine Damian and Terry." Slade offered a wry smile "It must have killed him when it didn't work."

"Anyway, in those earlier letters Napier mentions the other mers in his collection. He even sent Hadal pictures, but I have yet to find those. Anyway, they're all incredibly rare mixed breeds with unique mutations. Like; a snow pavos mix with alopecia, an algas rubrum mix with hypercauda, a blackfin rubrum mix with chimerism. And those are just his favourites." Slade looked down at the desk, closing his eye. "Napier displays them like objects, and when he's bored, he has them 'perform' for him, sometimes it's just your basic water dance or a bit of singing, but sometimes, he wants more. He has them fight, gets them to claw and bite at one another to see which one bleeds more. Then, when he's... *exited*. He has them…" But Slade couldn't finish that sentence, he simply drew in a breath and remained silent.

In that silence, Clark was left to dwell on the awful implications of Slade's words. What Hell could Napier be putting his mers through for his own amusement? Despite curiosity tugging at him, he knew he didn't want to know and was somewhat thankful for Slade's silence. "We'll get them back." He offered as Slade's stare remained fixated on the wood of the desk.

Slade nodded to himself before taking a deep breath. "I know we will. And I have a plan on how to do it. Which leads me to why I needed to talk to you."

"What do you need?"

"How many people know that Kryptonite kills you?"

Clark frowned at the question. "Uh." He had to think for a moment. "The League. Luthor." Clark lapsed into silence once more when he realized how short the list had gotten in recent years. He tried not to think about that. "That's about it." He finished lamely.

Slade leant back. "So how did Hadal find out?"

"Luthor." Clark said as evenly as he could manage. "He must have known that Luthor was the only person on Earth to know what could theoretically harm me. How he knew him well enough to meet with him, I don't know, but he mentioned something about asking him for something to kill me after his 'source' had told him I was Superman. One thing must have led to another, and he gave Hadal the Kryptonite and told him about the red sunlamps, too."

"Right." Slade said with a nod, as though that was what he was hoping for. "But aside from Luthor and your allies, and now Hadal, no one knows that Kryptonite '*kills* ' you."

Clark shrugged a shoulder. "I would have to say no."

"Good." Slade said, rifling through the letters. "Hadal sends Napier a letter every month. He used to send them more frequently, but I think once Napier began offering only doodles in response, he changed it to once a month. Anyway, I have an idea on how to lure Napier to finally offering Hadal a visit."

“You do?” Clark asked cautiously.

“Napier collects mers that are the rarest of the rare. Mers you wouldn’t just be able to go to the ocean and find.” Slade looked at Clark. “And I can think of no better rare breed to offer him than a Kryptonian half fin.”

Clark’s eyes blew wide, but before the multitude of thoughts that suddenly poured in could get a chance to be voiced, Slade held up his hand. “I'm not saying we actually give your children to Napier, Clark.” He insisted. “But what I am saying is that we write him a letter pretending to be Hadal; we’d tell him about how he took Bruce from Superman himself by using Kryptonite. We’ll mention that he’s pregnant and that the litter is bound to have at least one half fin and that in exchange for one of Napier’s abyssal fins, he's welcome to one.”

“You can’t be serious.” Clark hissed.

“It’s just to get a foot in the door.” Slade said. “Think about it, Clark. Hadal has been talking to Napier for *years* and has never been able to offer him a mer that he was interested in. Half fins are nothing considering the breeds he already owns. But a Kryptonian half fin? Half all powerful alien, half deep sea fin? Napier would cream his pants at the very idea.”

Clark felt his stomach roll. Sure, he could see the logic. It didn’t mean he had to like it, though. “I don’t like the idea of putting Bruce, much less my babies, in danger again.” He said simply. “Look at what happened last time. Bruce nearly got captured and I nearly died.”

“But you didn’t die.” Slade said breezily. “You’re alive, and so is Bruce, and now we have Hadal captive and the mers he held prisoner are free. You have to admit that the pros outweigh the cons there.”

“Still.” Clark said, more to himself.

“I understand your concern. Which is why we wouldn’t be sending Bruce in alone. That’s why I asked if anyone knows how Kryptonite effects you. We can tell Napier that Kryptonite *controls* Kryptonians. It doesn’t kill them. That way when we go to Napier, we can get you in the door too. As his ‘thrall’.”

“I don’t know.” Clark muttered. “I have a feeling it won’t be that simple.”

“Nothing with Napier ever is, but we have a month to iron out the details before we send him the letter. Joey will get to grips with learning how to be him, and Wintergreen and I are going to examine the way Hadal writes so that Napier won't suspect a thing from the letter.”

“And what if he still says no?” Clark asked, raising a brow. “You have to know that's a possibility.”

Slade nodded at that. “You’re right. He might. But if we send him proof, he’d have no reason to. Once Bruce is further along, we could take some photos, maybe even take some of you with a… I don't know…”

“A glowing green collar?” Clark deadpanned.

Slade raised his brows. “That could work.”

“I was kidding.”

“I wasn’t.”

Slade batted his hand at Clark. “The point is we have time to think things through, and…” Slade’s lip curled downward. “I know you've got a lot on your plate right now with Bruce, and really, I know I could have waited to tell you all this, but the truth is…” He looked away. “*I* needed someone to talk to.”

“Do you, uh…” Clark let out, before wondering what the rest of the sentence was. In the end, it was Slade raising his face and eyeing him expectantly that caused him to speak what he had been apparently wanting to ask. “Do you want a hug?”

Slade’s eye blew wide, and despite how dumb Clark felt for asking, and how his face grew redder the longer Slade's incredulous stare held his, eventually the man spoke. “I actually would.”

Clark stood up, and despite the fact he should have expected it, he still jolted in surprise when Slade stood too. He rounded the desk and once in front of Clark opened his arms and easily slid them underneath Clark's. For a brief moment, Clark didn't know what to do with his hands, but eventually put them on his back and patted him a few times. "There, there."

They stood there for a moment before he felt Slade huff. "God, you're shit at this." Yet, despite those words, he remained where he was, tucked against Clark. "It's like hugging a wall."

"Yeah, yeah." Clark said softly, patting him some more. "Just be thankful I showered recently."

He didn't hear it, but he felt Slade begin to laugh. He then saw it when the man pulled back, his mouth pulled into a grin. "That's true. God forbid I need a hug in a month's time. My eye might just burn right out of its socket."

"Haha." Clark said blandly. "I take it as you're making fun of me, you're feel better?"

"I actually do." Slade said, the remnants of a smile still on his face. "Thanks, Clark, and, I know this goes without saying, but you can talk to me about…" Slade rolled his hand. "You know. I promise I won't make fun of you or anything."

"You're really selling this to me." Clark muttered, unable to prevent a small smile of his own from tugging at his lips.

"I mean, sure you could talk to your 'friend.' But be honest, who would you really rather talk to about this shit?" Slade held up both hands, his palm facing upwards as he moved them up and down with each sentence. "A 'professional', or mentally ill man who's seen a lot of the same shit?"

"You're mentally ill?" Clark asked, tilting his head.

Slade for a moment, simply stared at him, before slowly taking a hand and setting it on his shoulder, his face awash with concern. "Are you being serious right now?"

“What?” Clark said with a shrug. “I didn’t know. I mean, you just hide it well.”

Slade narrowed his eye. “You are literally the only person who thinks that.”

“Really?”

“Clark. I *murder* people for a living.” Slade clasped his hands together. “Hell, I killed a man *yesterday* by making him hang himself for his wife to find. You think a man who does that isn’t a little fucked in the head?”

Clark pressed his lips together. “Okay, no. You have a point.” He then crossed his arms. “But at least you’re upfront about it.”

“Yeah, I’m not ashamed. Everyone’s got their demons, just a matter of how you deal with them.” Slade said, and despite not saying anything the pointed look he sent Clark’s way did enough.

Clark sighed. “I told you. I’m gonna deal with it.”

“Okay.” Slade said, holding his hands up to placate him. “I was just reminding you. That’s all.”

“Right. You and everyone else do love *reminding* me I need help.”

“Because you don’t seem to be doing much about it.”

“I know, I just--” he cut himself off with a huff. “I just don’t like talking about it. Okay?”

“I get that.” Slade said softly. “And I’m telling you, I’ve been there.”

“You really haven’t.” Clark muttered.

Slade grew quiet and when Clark chanced a look up at him, he saw hurt flash through his eye before being quickly hidden behind a now blank expression. Slade turned away from him and went to sit back down at the desk. “You can go now. I’m just gonna go through the letters again.”

Despite being told in no subtle terms to leave, Clark felt his conscious flair as the feeling that he had messed up settled on him. He would have apologized, had he known what exactly he was apologizing for. *For being an asshole,* his mind supplied. *Slade's used to that, though,* he couldn't help but respond.

In the end, he wasn't given the opportunity to even try and speak as Slade kept his attention firmly on the paper in his hands and after a moment, Clark left without a word, letting the door close behind him as he did.

Chapter End Notes

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Oh ho ho, Jack you rapscallion, wonder what you've been getting up to with our boys 👀

Also bonus points for anyone that can figure out who the other mers Napier has might be.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. As always let me know your thoughts. Until next time x

Chapter 40

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 16th 2016

As it turned out, thirteen hours wasn't that hard to occupy.

The key was to make sure that Bruce wasn't allowed to overthink the whole 'being stuck in a tank' thing and the best way Clark found to do that was to talk, sleep, or remind Bruce as each hour rolled by that he was indeed an hour closer to freedom.

Clark felt his stomach grumble at points, but considering Bruce was currently unable to eat at all, he thought it best to just suck it up and deal with it. In fact, that was what they spent the first hour talking about once he'd gotten back from his talk with Slade. He knew he had to think of a topic as innocuous as possible so as to not accidentally stumble into an area wherein Clark would have to use his appalling acting skills to try and act ignorant about what he had just learnt and food was the perfect topic for that. Bruce spoke of all the meat he would eat once out, and Clark made a mental list of all the different cuts of steak he would spoil him with as he did.

After that first hour though, an issue reared its head once more. That being, as Bruce slowly turned back into his surface form, his sync was getting weaker and weaker. By the end of the meat conversation, all Clark could hear was a quiet ringing in his ears, and worst of all, he couldn't remember the past hour.

He voiced as much to Bruce, who simply made a face as he brought his hands up. 'SYNC BROKE. WE WERE TALKING ABOUT BEEF.'

"Right." Clark said slowly, trying to find any memory of beef in the miasma that was his memory of the past hour and finding none. In fact, the longer he tried to think the more he remembered the past day just seemed to have evaporated. "My head feels funny…" he muttered to himself as he rubbed his temple.

Bruce's expression grew sympathetic. 'YOU CAN'T PROCESS THE MEMORIES WITHOUT ME.'

Clark made a face at the sentence, certain he was misunderstanding a few words. It was however as he thought back through conversations with Slade, that things began to make some sense. “Right. ‘Cause your proxy sync was what was allowing me to talk to you?”

Bruce nodded emphatically. ‘EXACTLY.’

“Gotcha.” Clark mumbled, though knowing the source of his brain fog did little to actually solve it. It still lingered, like heavy clouds in his mind.

The next ten hours were spent signing, sleeping, and after finding a white board marker, playing. Clark introduced Bruce to the magic of tic tac toe and they would play it with Clark drawing the box on the glass, and Bruce tapping where he wanted his noughts to go. After an hour or so of that, and with Bruce going from a complete novice to a tic tac toe expert, they moved onto other games that could be achieved through a marker.

They tried dots and boxes, Pictionary (though that was short lived owing to Clark’s inability to draw even a fish) and sprouts. As Clark racked his brain for what else they could do, he took to looking through Hadal’s bookshelf, hoping that there might be something to inspire him.

That inspiration came quickly as he scanned the shelf and found a worn sudoku book poking out from between two tomes concerning marine biology. He brought the book over to the tank, and began drawing a huge grid on one portion of the glass wall, copying the numbers from one of the puzzles onto it. Bruce’s face went from confused to horrified as Clark added more and more numbers and once finished, he explained the game to Bruce.

“Okay. Sudoku. You have nine boxes that are nine by nine.” He pointed to each in turn. “Each box can only have one each of one through to nine, and each row and column can only have one each of one through nine, too. Depending on difficulty, the puzzle can start with more or less numbers in it. This is an easy one, so each box has a few numbers already in it, see?”

Despite how Bruce’s face remained locked into what seemed like a perpetual look of confusion, he did eventually seem to understand what Clark was doing as he slowly filled the grid with a few more numbers. After staring for a few minutes, Bruce began to tap the blank squares and hold up his hands to indicate a number and after doing the first box, and then the first row, Bruce was like a machine, pointing and holding up fingers faster than Clark could write them down.

Once they were finished, Bruce began to sign ‘AGAIN’ in near constant repetition. That was the moment Clark realized he probably should have picked a different game, as the board alone for sudoku took Clark a good fifteen minutes to draw then fill in. What was worse, the entire time he was doing it, he would have to deal with Bruce's petulant frown staring at him through the pen ink, signing ‘HURRY UP’.

He decided to pick from the more challenging section of the book for this one, and luckily, Bruce didn’t breeze through it as quickly as he had done the first, even getting a few numbers wrong at points, much to Bruce's chagrin. After thirty minutes, it was finished, and Clark heaved a sigh as he went about drawing up the next one.

They did a few puzzles before taking a nap. How long he dozed for, Clark didn’t know, but he did know when he awoke, Bruce was already awake, tapping on the glass. “Yeah, yeah… I’ll do you another puzzle, you gremlin.”

it was as Clark was drawing what felt like his hundredth grid, though in reality he knew it was only his twentieth, that he heard someone approaching.

“What the Hell...” he heard Slade mumble from the doorway. “The Hell are you two doing in here?”

With the front and sides of the tank being almost completely covered, Clark had to peer through the ink to spy where Slade was standing. “Playing.” Was all he said as he kept drawing the numbers in.

“Yeah, I can see that.” Slade muttered as he came to the back side of the tank where Clark stood. It was also the only portion of the tank you could actually still see Bruce and so Slade peered through the glass to look at him, his head jutting out in a way that told Clark that they were indeed syncing.

“Bruce says you’re doing a good job of distracting him.” Slade said softly.

Clark felt his cheeks turn red so occupied himself by writing out more numbers. “Well, when we lost the proxy sync we had to get creative.” He muttered, using his index finger to rub out a number he miswrote. He wrote down the correct one in its place. “How are things on your end?”

“Good.” Slade said quickly as he crossed his arms. “We’re just ironing out details on how we’re gonna transport Bruce from here to Leslie’s.”

“I could take him in my boat." Clark offered, having now finished the grid. He didn't however get to take a break as Bruce was already tapping and holding up his hands.

“Thanks, but for the sake of keeping things on the down low, we’ll move him in the shipping container. Grant has already gone to pick it up. Selina’s already in Sacramento, by the way. She sends her regards.”

“Yeah?” Clark asked, writing in a three before Bruce tapped aggressively on the glass and held up the number four. He rubbed out the three. “How is Tim?”

“Good.” Slade said, to both him and Bruce. “He’s doing a lot better actually. All of them are. It’s still early days, sure, and withdrawal hasn’t kicked in yet, but they’re in the best hands possible when it does.”

It was as Clark was writing down a number, that he heard a faint hiss and then a beeping sound. He made a face. “What was that?”

“Probably the pressure lock releasing.” Slade said, unsurprised. “It’s been twenty four hours.”

Clark let go of the marker and turned to him, his eyes wide. “It has?”

He heard something else and by the time he turned back to Bruce, he saw he was no longer at the bottom of the tank and was now instead pressed up against the top, trying to push it open. Clark flew up to meet him, lifting the heavy steel lid up.

The moment Bruce poked his head out into the air, he took a deep breath and water dripped out of his gills. He looked at Clark, a watery smile tugging on his face. He darted forward, rubbing his forehead against Clark’s. “Hey, B.” He whispered as he tugged Bruce from the water and out onto the ground.

They sat like that for a moment, until eventually Bruce pulled back, a finger going up to his mouth. Clark couldn’t help but laugh. “Yeah, yeah, I'll get you some--”

“Already done.” Slade interrupted as he reappeared holding aloft a plate. Clark hadn’t even noticed he’d left. “Got a couple of fish. You can have more later, but I don't want you to overeat after fasting for so long.”

Bruce grumbled at that, but still ate the fish offered to him. He chewed on the skull and sucked out the eye as Clark simply held him, happy to finally feel him again. He didn’t care that his clothes were getting wet or how his stomach was now trying to eat itself. He was just so relieved to finally have Bruce out of the tank.

Once the fish were eaten, and Slade shoved a cereal bar into Clark’s hand, they left the lab and made their way onto Slade's boat. Grant and Joey were going to stay on the sub to keep an eye on things, as well as keep Hadal sedated, and Slade and Clark would take Bruce to Sacramento.

On the boat, Clark managed to find something else to eat as the cereal bar might as well have been air for how little it filled him. In the kitchenette, he found bread, peanut butter and a jar of jelly and despite not having made a PB&J sandwich since he was twelve, he made and ate three of them in quick succession.

Slade found him whilst he was on his forth, having settled Bruce into the small tub in the bedroom. Given Bruce had just spent the entire day in a confined space, Clark could understand why he wasn’t eager to get into another one right away. Slade informed him he’d move Bruce into the container as they got closer to Sacramento. Whilst he was dozing, and not knowing what else to say to Slade after being told this, he simply held up his sandwich. “You want one?”

Slade looked surprised for a moment, before shaking his head. “Nah, I ate already.”

Clark only nodded as he took another bite. They were quiet as Slade remained by the door, now leaning on it as Clark chewed. Once he was finished, he cleaned up the counter and turned back to Slade. “How long till we’re there?”

“Couple hours.” Slade said. “Already told Wintergreen and Rose that we’re coming.”

“Ah, yes, Rose.” Clark muttered. “It will be good to see her agai n.”

Slade beamed with pride. “She gave you the ‘Wintergreen’ treatment, I take it?”

“Yeah.” Clark frowned. “But she kept doing it even after she found out we weren’t just random customers.”

“Yeah…” Slade said fondly. “She's been like that ever since she was a baby. My thorny Rose.”

“She's just…” Clark shook his head. “Nothing like you or Selina.”

Slade levelled his stare. “She’s just like Bruce, though.”

Clark opened his mouth to object but in that moment, memories of his first months with Bruce came back to him. The annoyed looks, the attitude, the near constant needling. He felt his frown growing. “Oh God.” He muttered.

Slade just nodded. “Yeah, when Rose was a baby she always wanted to spend time with her ‘uncle Bruce’, though she couldn’t say ‘uncle’ or ‘Bruce’ back then, so really, he was her ‘uncy Bwoose’. Thing was, Bruce wasn’t used to handling human babies so he always looked constipated every time he had to hold her, but despite that, Rose thought the world of him. To the point where she basically became the female equivalent of him the older she got.”

Clark couldn't argue with that.

As they neared Sacramento, they moved Bruce into the container and approached the dock. As they stepped off the boat, they entered the office where in Clark found himself receiving the 'Wintergreen' treatment once more.

Rose was sat in her usual spot, her feet up on the desk. As the door bell chimed, she looked up at them both and grimaced. “We don’t serve pensioners here.” She muttered, before looking back down at her phone.

Slade frowned. “Hey, I'm sixty. That doesn’t make me a pensioner.”

“Wait. You’re *sixty* ?” Clark blurted out, unable to stop himself.

Rose snorted. “Wow dad, are you lying to your new boy toys about how much of a fossil you are?”

Clark however was still caught up on what he saw as a huge revelation. “Whoa whoa, time out. You're *sixty* . As in six *zero* .”

“Technically I'm sixty two, but yeah.” Slade tilted his head. “Why is that surprising to you?”

“Because you don’t look sixty.” Clark said incredulously. “Even with the white hair, you look…” but he didn’t finish, choosing to trail off instead.

“Black fin blood, Clark.” Slade winked. “Makes us age slower once we reach adulthood.”

“So how olds Selina?”

“A hundred.” Rose interjected.

“She’s forty seven.” Slade said, ignoring her.

“She is?” Clark asked, unable to school his face. “Jesus… And how old’s Bruce?”

Slade looked up in thought. “I think we worked it out that he was five years younger than Selina… So forty two?”

“Wow.” Clark said quietly. “So he’s older than me.”

“How old are you?”

“A hundred.” Rose interjected.

“Forty.” Clark said, ignoring her.

“Hey, you look good for your age, too.” Slade said, patting his shoulder in what Clark couldn’t help but view as condescending. “With that alien DNA of yours and their black fin blood; your kids are gonna age like fine wine.”

After that, Clark and Rose made their way down to the tunnel whilst Slade grabbed Wintergreen and took him out to the dock to move the container in. The ride in the elevator was quiet and mostly consisted of Clark watching Rose from the corner of his eye, she had her arms crossed and a small frown on her lips, and Clark couldn’t help but say. “You’re a lot like Bruce.”

He chanced a look at her, and instead of the grimace he was expecting he saw a mild look of surprise, *then* the grimace. She let out a huff. “I’m nothing like him.” She said, but there was little venom to her voice and if Clark squinted, it almost looked as though she was smiling.

“If you say so…”

Once in the tunnel, they reconvened with Slade and Wintergreen and during the long walk to the clinic, Slade and Wintergreen spoke about matters far too complicated for Clark to want to pay attention to and Rose walked ahead of them all, as though unwilling to allow Clark within even five feet of her lest he say more things that cause her carefully crafted veneer to chip. Clark was content with the comfortable silence though, as he had a feeling the clinic was going to be anything but.

He was correct as upon the elevator doors opening to the clinic, he saw all the mers from yesterday in much higher spirits; darting through the water as they seemed to race one another. There was also music playing now, though it mostly consisted of the sound of waves and distant bird calls.

Leslie sat by her desk in the far corner of the room, but she wasn't the only person out of the water. Two people were lounging along the faux shore line, one of which was Selina, who despite being literally underground was wearing a sunhat and sunglasses along with her bikini. Beside her was Tim, now looking far more awake and lively. They both waved across at them as Rose lifted her arm and reluctantly waved back.

Just then, the other elevator opened up and Slade stepped out, his grin wide as he beamed at Tim. "How's my little pipsqueak feeling?"

"I'm not a pipsqueak!" Tim yelled back, but he was fighting back a smile the whole while.

"I dunno compared to your papa, you're practically an anchovy."

Tim's face lit up at that. "Is he in there?" he asked as he shimmied across the tiles towards them. "Can I see him?"

"Yeah, just mind out, Timmy." Wintergreen said, waving his hand. "He's gonna come rushing out with the water."

He bent over and pulled the release latch and as he did the door swung open and Bruce did indeed slide out with the water, though he didn't go into one of the pools as he spied Tim and immediately rushed towards him instead. The moment they made contact, he wrapped his arms around him and pulled him close, tucking him under his jaw.

As Clark watched them, Selina rose from her spot and approached both him and Rose. Rose looked up at her and nodded. "Mom."

"How's my baby doing?" She asked softly, reaching in a pulling Rose flush against her. "Has Wintergreen given you the cookies I've been sending?"

"No, he eats them and pretends they got lost in the mail..." Rose grumbled.

“I’ll talk to him.” Selina said, as she pulled back. She then turned her attention to Clark and smiled brightly. “And there he is... My hero.” She went to hug him too and Clark was certain if he wasn’t taller than her, his face would have ended up in her chest, but as it stood, she simply set her own into his. “Thank you…” she whispered.

“Don’t mention it, Selina.” Clark said softly, bringing his arms up to wrap around her. “I’m just happy everyone's safe.”

“Yeah.” She said as she stepped back, her eyes watering. “Now come on, you never got to meet Tim properly, did you?”

She began to walk across the tiles leaving Clark no choice but to follow. Despite how much he felt as though he was intruding, he forced himself to ignore those thoughts as he came up to Bruce and Tim, still holding on to one another. As Clark and Selina neared, Bruce pulled back, trilling to draw Tim’s attention towards them. He looked up at the two, his eyes lingering on Clarks. “You’re Clark, aren't you?”

“Yup.” Clark said, shoving his hands into his pockets when he realized he didn’t know what else to do with them. “And you’re Tim.”

Compared to his brothers, Tim looked the most like both of his parents. Jason looked the most like Selina, with his green eyes and deep skin. Dick on the other hand had sun kissed skin, sure, but his face was all Bruce. Tim by comparison bore Bruce's pale skin, and blue eyes but Selina slim face and cat-like features. He even offered Clark a small smile at his words, and Clark could see the mix of Selina and Bruce in it clear as day.

“I would say nice to meet you, but we’ve already met.” Tim said.

“Well, you were barely conscious the last time, so I feel like we can still say it.”

“True.” Tim said, swishing his tail.

“Speaking of…" Selina interjected, crouching down to be beside Tim. “Leslie said she wants to keep you here for a week just to make sure your okay, then you can move back home and we can do your

detoxing there.”

“What about my friends?” Tim asked quietly.

Selina turned back to the pools, watching the mers as they swam through the water. “They can stay here until they’ve finished detoxing and then they’ll go back out into the ocean.”

“But…” Tim made a face, before cutting himself off.

Selina let out a breath as she stood up. “Go play with your friends, baby. I’m gonna go talk to Slade, and you,” she turned to Clark, “should speak with Leslie.”

“Right.” Clark said, looking down at Bruce. “You ready?”

Bruce chirped, and without a word, Tim slipped silently into the water, swimming to the cluster of mers in the pool. Bruce shimmied along with Clark as they made their way across the room to the small lab area at the back, where an elderly woman was busy typing away. “Good to see you again, Clark.” She said warmly before she stood from her chair and grinned brightly down at Bruce. “And you…”

She slowly crouched down to her knees and Bruce quickly approached her, pressing his face into her neck as she held him. “You’re a sight for sore eyes…” she whispered before pulling back, her smile still there. “So I hear you went and got yourself knocked up?”

Clark cleared his throat at the comment as Bruce huffed a laugh and hopped onto the examination bed beside Leslie. She stood up and went to the ultrasound machine, wheeling it over to him. “Now I want to reiterate, the babies should be fine but if they aren't I want you to know I will do everything in my power to treat them.”

Clark simply nodded as he crossed his arms, suddenly cold in the humid room. He approached Bruce on the table, causing the mer to reach his hand out and grip onto Clark’s shirt, offering a quiet trill as he did. “I’m fine…” Clark whispered, trying for a smile and realizing he failed if Bruce’s grimace was anything to go by.

“Now, let's have a look…” Leslie said as she set the transducer on Bruce’s stomach and this time, Clark schooled his breathing as the sound assaulted him his senses. *It’s okay* . He told himself. *Everything is okay.*

Leslie moved the wand around and as she looked at the screen, Clark did much the same, though the grainy image left a lot to the imagination. After a few minutes, Leslie set it down, and when she eyed Clark, he tried not to cry when he saw her smile. “They look fine.”

“Thank God.” Clark sighed. He fell against Bruce and buried himself against his chest. “I’m so glad…”

“I still want to keep him here for a few days, though. Given he’s had morphine and been under pressure, I just want to keep an eye on him.”

“Yeah, of course.” Clark said, standing up. He wiped his face and cleared his throat. “Anything else you need from me?”

Leslie smiled at that. “No, I think we can manage.”

“Okay…” Cla rk looked to Bruce. “You gonna be okay here?”

Bruce nodded, reaching for Clark and chirpi ng.

“He says ‘are you going to be okay?’.” Leslie said.

“Me?" Clark asked, genuinely surprised. “Yeah, i’ll be fine." When Bruce's expression didn’t change, he bent down and kissed his forehead. “I’ll be fine.” He repeated. “I promise.”

This time, Bruce looked less unconvinced and slid off the table and into the water as Clark said goodbye to Leslie. By the time he made his way back over to Slade and Selina, Rose was sitting by the edge of the water with Tim, and Bruce popped his head up in front of her. As Clark took in Rose's expression, he saw a bright smile on her face that was unlike any he had ever seen before.

Clark came to a stop beside Slade and nodded. “You good?”

“Yeah, just talking through some stuff. Are you ready to head out?”

“Yeah." Clark said, before turning to Selina. “I take it you're gonna stay here?”

“Until Tim is given the all clear, I ain't budging.” Selina said with a firm nod before turning back to Slade. “Also, when you see the boys, can you tell them I left food in the refrigerator for a reason, and that the credit card was for emergencies only and *not* pizza?”

“Will do.” Slade said, with a bob of the head. “Now let’s roll.”

Rose chose to stay at the clinic, whilst Clark, Slade and Wintergreen went back through the tunnel. Once there, they said their goodbyes to Wintergreen and Clark joined Slade in his boat for the trip back.

“You should probably come to Cottonwood tomorrow.” Slade said once they were both sitting in the cockpit.

“Oh?” Clark asked, turning his attention away from the vast ocean before them. “Why’s that?”

“I plan on speaking with Walter, and I figure you should probably be with me.”

Clark sent him a withering stare. “Just because he built Hadal’s home, doesn’t mean he’s bad.”

“But he *might* be. He’s probably used to making mer friendly homes because of all the people he’s met through the market.” Slade scowled. “I knew it was weird he didn’t question Selina wanting a salt water spa in her home.”

“Look, before we start assuming the worst, can we at least talk to him?” Clark asked. “I already gave him my deposit.”

Slade laughed at that, and with his fading smile he nodded. “Alright, alright. I’d hate to be the reason you’d need to find another architect to renovate your island.”

“Thanks…” Clark said with a roll of the eyes.

They parted ways not long after, with Clark flying home as Slade continued to sail to the submarine.

Once his feet touched sand, Clark looked around at his island and couldn’t help but think about how alien it felt to him now. Despite living here for four years, there was something that just didn’t feel right and it was with a start that Clark realized what.

Bruce wasn’t here. He was alone once more, and suddenly, he understood why Bruce asked if he was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

I actually uploaded a chapter for Mermay! Yay!

Just out of curiosity, I had a look at when I uploaded previous chapters of the fic, and I think its kinda funny how my mermaid fic has now only had two chapters uploaded in the month that celebrates all things mermaids XD

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. I've been kinda in a rut, but my Uni course is over till September and I'm on new medication for my anxiety, so things are looking up :)

Stay safe and I'll see you all next time x

Chapter 41

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 17th 2016

It had been a mostly sleepless night.

The ‘mostly’ was due to the fact that Clark was certain he was asleep at points; he just couldn’t distinguish the awake parts from the sleeping ones.

As the sun rose and streamed in through his window, he turned and burrowed his face into the pillow with a groan. He contemplated staying in bed for the day. His anxiety addled mind had finally quieted down to the point where Clark was certain if he kept his mind empty he *might* just be able to drift off into actual sleep and not whatever diet alternative he had been subjected to last night.

He didn’t exactly have much planned for the day. Yes he agreed to go with Slade to speak to Walter, yes he should probably be productive and not just become one with his mattress but it wasn’t as if Slade would come to drag him off to Cottonwood if he decided to do just that.

Clark cracked his eyes open at that thought.

Who was he kidding, Slade would definitely do that.

And so it was with several grumbles that Clark rose from bed and got dressed. He gave himself a once over in the mirror and when he decided he looked only slightly more raggedy than usual, he hopped on his boat and made his way to Cottonwood.

He bypassed the main docks and moored at the Kyle family’s private one. He saw Slade's sleek yacht already there and after parking up alongside it, he made his way towards the stately manor and knocked on the front door.

After some hushed words and hurried steps Jason opened the door.

Before promptly shutting it again.

Clark let out a sigh. “Haha,” he muttered. “Very funny, Jason. Now can you let me in?”

“No.” Came Jason's muffled response.

Clark pursed his lips. Normally Jason’s antagonism wouldn’t get to him, but given he had quite literally forced himself out of his bed this morning, Clark realized his patience was nowhere to be seen. He nodded to himself and stepped off the porch. He looked around and found what he was after. An open window. It was on the second story, but that wasn’t exactly an issue for him. He flew up to it and once inside he flew to the entrance hall, landing beside Jason. The teen jolted back with a yelp the moment he registered Clark’s presence.

“You should really keep the windows latched.” Clark said with a faint smile. “You never know who might try to break in.”

Jason did his best to swipe the startled look from his face and barely succeeded. “I forgot you could do that…” He muttered.

“Yeah, you might want to keep it in mind next time you try to lock me out.” Clark said as he patted Jason on the shoulder. “Now, where’s Slade?”

“In the kitchen.” Jason replied with only minimal grumbling.

“Thanks.”

With that clipped exchange, Clark made his way through the house and soon found Slade sitting at the kitchen counter, newspaper open and coffee in hand. He nodded to Clark as he entered.

It was somewhat surreal to see him in such a domestic setting. He knew Slade didn't just shoot guns and threaten people every minute of every day, but like this, he looked more like a suburban dad than the literal force of nature Clark had come to know. "Mornin'." He said with a bob of the head. "How was your trip over?"

Clark went to the coffee pot and poured himself a cup. "Trip over was fine. Jason however was not. He shut the door in my face when I knocked."

Slade batted his hand at him. "Eh, don't mind him. He'll warm up to you eventually."

Clark took a sip from his coffee. "See, I'm not too sure of that."

"Well, I am." Slade said. "You gotta understand, he's a little on edge at the moment given Tim, Selina and now Bruce are at Leslie's. I guarantee you in a few days he won't be as frosty."

Clark simply shrugged. "I'll have to take your word for it…"

After he drank the coffee, Clark felt more awake at least but that wasn't to say he exactly felt good; simply less drained. His eyes still stung, and his limbs still felt heavy, but at least he wasn't liable to fall asleep on the nearest comfortable surface anymore.

He even helped himself to a danish that was out on the counter. Slade informed him they were from the bakery in town, made fresh this morning. Clark found himself humming in enjoyment as he finished his first, then humming some more as he took his second and then his third.

Once he was done, Slade closed his newspaper and eyed Clark. "So are you ready?"

Clark licked the glaze from his fingers. He wondered if he could get away with having a fourth but decided against it. "Ready for what?"

"Walter."

“Oh.” Clark let out. “Right.” It had completely slipped his mind. In fact, he’d forgotten a lot of things the minute he bit into that first danish.

He was definitely going to need the name of the bakery.

“Don’t worry, I won't kill him.” Slade said casually as he got up from his stool and approached him. He patted his shoulder and offered a smile. “So, are you ready?”

Despite seeing what had to be a less than enthused expression on his face, Slade still left the room with a confident swagger in his step. Clark had no choice but to follow and when he did, he saw Slade was already out on the porch, half jogging down the steps and out the front gates.

They went down the street and came across the development. There were some barriers up and even a few roaming workers, but none appeared to be doing any actual work and were instead all on their phones or smoking. They watched Slade and Clark curiously as they approached and one of them jerked her head up at the pair. “Can we help you?”

“We’re looking for your boss.” Slade said, looking around at the exposed foundations and erected stud walls. “He here?”

The woman nodded, taking a drag from her cigarette. “Yeah, he’s just on the phone over there.” She pointed to the far side of the building sight.

“Just look for the short man on the verge of a heart attack.” Another worker added.

Slade nodded whilst Clark only grimaced at the words. Slade began to walk and after looking around the back side of the building they did indeed find Walter, who did in fact look to be on the verge of some sort of medical emergency.

“--look, I understand your husband… yes, yes…I know, it’s a tragedy, but surely you’d still like a nice home for yourself-- no, you misunderstand me, my point is that you’ve already paid the deposit, so you won’t get it back. Wouldn’t you rather minimize your losses and--”

Clark heard the familiar sound of a dial tone, and when Walter pulled the phone away from his face, he looked at the screen like it had thrown his pet out of a moving vehicle. He took a deep breath and whilst gathering himself he must have spotted Clark across the way as his face immediately changed. The flop sweat was still present of course, as were the frown lines across his forehead but his smile seemed to be at least somewhat genuine. “Mr. Wilson! Clark! What a pleasant surprise.” He held his hand out, but perhaps sensing how damp it was he quickly retracted it and wiped it on his pants before offering it again. “You haven’t caught me at a good time…”

“What's the matter, Walter?” Clark asked, taking his hand as a courtesy.

Walter let out a sigh and it was almost as though an entire canister's worth of air left him for how deflated he became from it. “This project fell through. So it looks like I'm out a few hundred thousand.”

Clark winced as he retracted his hand. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Walter nodded, taking a deep breath. “Yeah, things aren't great at the moment.”

“‘Fraid they’re not going to get much better…" Slade said as he removed what Clark now realized was a gun from his waistband. “Tell me everything you know about Elijah Hadal or your brains are going on the wall.”

“ *Slade. Jesus Christ* .” Clark blurted, his hand reaching for the barrel of the gun and pointing it away from Walter's now ashen face. “What the Hell happened to showing restraint?”

“I never said I'd show restraint.” Slade said, attempting to move the gun back towards Walter and failing. Slade was strong but he wasn’t exactly Kryptonian strong. “I just said you should probably be with me.”

“I thought we agreed we’d *talk* to him.”

Slade scoffed. “What is this if it’s not talking?”

“An interrogation.” Clark deadpanned.

“ *Which* is a form of talking.” Slade replied haughtily

“Oh my God…” Clark muttered as he ripped the gun from Slade's grip and held it away when the man tried to grab for it. He turned to Walter and offered an apologetic smile. “Sorry about him, Walter, he’s just a bit…” Clark pursed his lips. “Cooky.”

Slade frowned. “ *Cooky* ?”

Clark whirled on him, his expression thunderous. “My Ma taught me to be polite when talking about *crazy* people.” He whispered harshly before turning back to Walter and offering another strained smile. “Now we’re not going to kill you Walter, but if you could answer Slade's question that would be great.”

Walter however now appeared to be adding ‘stroke’ to his list of ailments as he stood there frozen. He eventually let out a shaky breath and then a quiet sob. “Please don’t kill me.”

“We’re not going to.” Clark said softly.

“I mean, *I* might.”

“ *Slade* .”

“What? You think I only have *one* gun on me?” He blew a raspberry. “Please.”

Clark let out a strangled sigh as he turned his attention back to Walter. “Look, Walter, I know you’re freaking out right now, but I mean it, we won’t hurt you, we just want to know how you and Melissa ended up working for Hadal. That’s all.”

Walter still looked petrified, but Clark was happy to say he looked at least slightly *less* petrified. He let out another shaky breath and eyed Slade. “If I tell you… You won’t hurt me?”

Clark turned to Slade, and when he saw him frown, Clark bumped against his shoulder hard enough to elicit a quiet ‘ow’ from the man. “Yes, I won't hurt you if you tell us.” Slade grumbled.

At that, Walter sat down on one of the many crates nearby and wiped his face with a handkerchief. “There’s not much to tell, really. It must have been seven years ago that he called and asked us to renovate his island. Melissa and I were just starting out so we were eager to prove ourselves. I knew going in it was going to be a challenge. What he wanted was a lot, even for an experienced developer. Hell, before we did Hadals’ place, the biggest project me and Mel had undertaken were a couple of flats, but if anything, Hadal seemed to like that we were inexperienced. I think it was because we didn’t ask too many questions. Just got on with whatever he asked for. Mel told me she had a bad feeling about it all, but I told her this was our opportunity to earn thousands and really make a name for ourselves. It didn’t help that Hadal would tell me over and over that after we finished his home, he was going to recommend us to countless others who wanted work done.”

Clark could feel Slade radiating anger beside him and because of this, he rested his hand gently on his arm. The gesture had its intended effect as Slade took a deep breath and turned his head away. Clark turned his attention back to Walter. “And did he?” He asked.

Walter looked away. “He did. Not the 'countless' he promised, but he did send a few rich folks who wanted big, expensive homes with plenty of spacious fish tanks our way. They all seemed harmless enough, none of them gave me and Mel the creeps quiet like Hadal did, but I knew what those tanks were going to have in them and I just…”

“Yet you built them anyway.” Slade interrupted, his eye narrowing.

Walter’s face took on a curious expression as he looked up at the two of them. “I did, and you wanna know why? Because of people like *you* . You and Ms. Kyle asked for a salt water spa with a tank deep enough to sink a boat in despite living on a beach and Clark--” he pointed a finger in his direction, “you wanted a *huge* salt water pool despite living on your own private island. So tell me gentleman, how exactly am I meant to tell the difference between customers who are lunatic mer collectors and folks who I have to presume are part mer?”

Clark startled back and judging from Slade's expression, the sentiment was shared. “You know about mernans?” Clark asked cautiously.

“I overhear a lot when I work.” Walter shrugged. “I don’t know much about it all, but I do know there are folks who are part mer out there. They end up having kids with fins or gills and they want to make sure their home is able to accommodate that." Walter raised a brow at Slade. "So Ms. Kyle... I presume she has a mer kid?”

Slade’s jaw clenched.

“And…” He continued, turning his narrowed eyes to Clark. “I don't recall you saying you had kids, so… Merner?”

Clark looked away, his face now warm.

“And there we have it." Walter said, clasping his hand together. “The reason I have work; I don’t question why people want what they want. I get a job, I do it. If people want tanks, I get them tanks. If they want pools, I build them pools. Some folks might just have a kid or lover who have fins instead of feet so who am I to deny them my services on the off chance they’re actually a collector? Sure, you can call me out for working for Hadal, and the first few people he sent my way, but after that, I got some genuine people who I knew weren’t all bad. Maybe a few passed the sniff test and were actually rotten, but the point is if I'm paid to do a job, I do the job and if that makes me just as bad as the people who collect mers then I guess you better just shoot me, Mr. Wilson.”

Clark turned to Slade to stop him raising another fun Walter's way, but when he did, he saw no gun, saw that Slade didn’t look annoyed, if anything he looked to be in strangely good humour. “I like you.” He said with a smile.

Walter raised a brow. “...Thank you?”

“I don’t kill people I like, so you’re good.” Slade waved his hand. “In fact, this place. The lady who wanted it doesn’t any more, am I right?”

If Clark was getting whiplash from the conversation, Walter definitely was as he let out a few half words before finally managing to get out a sentence. “Yes, she said she’s moving away. Her husband committed suicide you see and--”

“A tragedy.” Slade interrupted. “So I’ll buy this place from you, instead.”

“You--” Walter’s eyes widened. “You will?”

Slade shoved his hands into his pockets. “Yeah. Selina’s next door and you can never have too many properties in my line of work.”

Walter’s face remained blank for a few more moments before a large grin erupted on his face. He jumped up and immediately went to grab Slade's hand, shaking it quickly. “You won’t regret this Mr. Wilson. The deposit has already been paid, so I will be able to give you a discount!”

Slade nodded. “Great, but I gotta ask whilst I have you; how easy would it be to get a big ole saltwater pool with an underwater tunnel that connects to Selina’s added to this place?”

Walter didn’t even pause. “It would be no trouble at all.”

Slade smiled. “Now I'm *really* glad I didn't kill you.”

Clark’s eyes blew wide as Walter simply smiled back. The death threats were apparently water under the bridge at this point between the pair and he simply set his hands on his hips with a victorious air. “Well, if you’ll excuse me gentleman, I better tell my crew to get back to work!”

Walter marched off with a literal skip in his step and Clark slowly turned to Slade. “He really does just not question anything, does he?”

“And *that* is precisely why he is my new favourite contractor." Slade said, folding his arms as he wistfully watched Walter disappear around a corner. “I threatened to kill him and he didn’t *once* ask why.”

Clark frowned. “I mean, I'm sure he gathered it was because he worked for Hadal in the past.”

“Right, and I'll be sure to ask him a few more questions about him and the other ‘collectors’ he’s worked for, but for now, I just want him to get to work on my new house.”

“So you’re really gonna move here?”

Slade shrugged. “Not permanently, but like I said, in my line of work I like to have multiple properties. Makes it harder for people to track me down.”

“Right…” Clark muttered.

Slade turned and patted Clark on the back. “Well, all in all, I think that went very well.”

“Yeah, I'm glad I helped to prevent another felony being added to your ever growing list.” Clark deadpanned.

Slade offered a sickly sweet smile. “And whilst I do appreciate that, I will be needing my gun back.”

Clark had almost forgotten about it and the moment he lifted it up, Slade's hand darted forward and snatched it from his grip. Clark sent him a withering stare. “What are you, four?”

“A four year old wouldn’t be able to hold a gun this big, Clark. They’d break their little wrists.” Slade said with a roll of the eyes as he placed it back in his holster. “Now, I'm gonna head back and check on the boys. What are your plans for the rest of the day?”

Clark paused. He hadn’t really planned this far again. His list for the day only included 'get out of bed' and 'prevent Slade from committing homicide'. Really, there was a lot he needed to do and whilst he was on Cottonwood, he could deal with a large number of them. “I got some things I need to take care of.” He said simply.

“Well, alrighty.” Slade replied. “I’ll catch you later then, Clark.”

With that, Slade walked away though he didn’t go the route they had entered from and instead went down onto the beach and trudged along the sand back to the Kyle’s. Clark watched him go until eventually he realized he should probably get moving.

He left the property, passing several now moving workers as he did. When he got to the street he began to walk down it, passing several shops as he did but there was one in particular he was looking for.

When came to it, he pushed open the door. The bell chimed above him and whilst there were no customers inside, there was someone sitting behind the counter, book open before her. Her face lit up the moment she saw him.

“Clark!”

“Hey Luce.” He smiled. “How have you been?”

But Lucy didn’t respond right away, opting to instead rush from behind the counter and wrap her arms around him. Clark didn’t know how to respond at first, but as Lucy's grip tightened he gave a small laugh and brought his arms around her. “That good, huh?”

“You don’t know that half of it.” Lucy said as she pulled back, her smile still in place though her eyes were now considerably more glassy. “I’ve been waiting for you to show your face around here so I could finally say thank you.”

“I take it Barbara came to see you?”

“She did.” Lucy grinned. “We had a big old talk about everything and I think she finally understands why I did what I did. I know she’s still upset about it all, but it takes time to rebuild trust and I'm gonna give her that.” She took a deep breath. “I owe her that.”

“Glad to hear.”

Lucy sent him another smile, though this one was considerably shyer than the first. “I'll take it she told you.”

“Told me what?”

“What we are.”

“Oh, that.” Clark said, waving his head. “Yeah, she told me.”

When Clark looked at Lucy, her face was frozen but after a beat she broke into a grin and laughed, even going as far as to slap Clark on the shoulder. “God, I don't think you could have given me a less surprised reaction if you tried.”

Clark felt himself smile and even huffed a laugh. “Takes a lot to surprise me, Luce.”

“Still, I would have thought finding out someone was part mer would have caused at least a little bit of a reaction.”

“Well, I’m not exactly human myself.”

That caused Lucy to pause. She raised a brow. “What species?”

Clark raised a brow at the question before shaking his head. “Oh, no. I'm not a mernan.” He brought his hand up and rested it over his heart. “I'm an alien.”

“You’re--” Lucy frowned, pulling back. “You’re a what?”

“An alien.” Clark repeated. “I wasn’t born on this planet.”

Lucy's eyes blew wide. “...Are you serious?”

“Yup.”

Lucy remained where she stood for a little while longer before she eventually shuffled back to her stool and all but fell onto it. “That is… something." After a moment she huffed, offering a wry smile. “Though that definitely does explain why mernans aren't all that surprising to you.”

“Yeah… I mean don’t get me wrong I was surprised when I first heard about it, but when Porter told me all--”

Clark paused, his mouth snapping shut.

Lucy however looked up at him, her eyebrows high. “Porter’s a mernan?”

“Uh.” Clark pressed his lips together.

Despite not responding, Lucy carried on as if he had. “Wow…” Lucy muttered to herself. “I had no idea…”

Clark grimaced. “Yeah, and if you could not tell anyone that would be *great* .”

Lucy batted her hand at him. “Of course I won't tell no one. What do you take me for? Porter’s a good man though maybe not *that* good considering what he’s been doing recently…”

Clark raised a brow. “What's that now?”

“Oh.” Lucy's eyes blew wide. “God, you must not of heard. Antonio… he… hung himself the other day. I know you had your issues with him, but God, to know he must have been suffering as much as he was to do that… It was enough to make me cry when I heard. Carla of course was devastated, we talked about it all and she told me she’s moving to Sacramento to be with her sister. She had been planning on moving to that new development next to the Kyle’s but now that Antonio’s gone, she told me there's nothing here for her anymore. I think a new city would be good for her anyway. Hell, with the lottery money Antonio won, she can really make a fresh start for herself.”

Clark made a face. “And what does that have to do with Porter, exactly?”

“Oh!” Lucy blurted. “Right, well that’s just it. Porter’s been smiling like crazy ever since he heard the news. I know him and Antonio had issues, but like I said, the man went and *hung* himself. I feel like whatever it was Antonio did to him, couldn’t have been *that* bad.”

Clark couldn’t help it. “He killed Tom, Luce.”

“He--” Lucy stammered to a stop. “He did what now?”

“He killed Tom.” Clark said firmly. “His mer didn’t do it. Antonio told me when he tried to kill *me* .”

Lucy however only blew a raspberry. “You don’t know what you're talking about Clark.”

But Clark just shook his head. “Antonio and his 'boys' went to Tom’s farm to threaten his mer. They wanted to buy some of his land for Colin to be able to make a living for himself after losing his boat in the last mer attack. When Tom said no and fought back, Antonio killed him and blamed it on his mer.”

But Lucy still looked unconvinced, though her eyes began to betray her.

“And you remember when you were all nearly starving?” Clark continued. “Him and his boys were the reason for that too. After the mer attacks when no one was heading up to Redding anymore, they took the Sacramento shipment for themselves to get by and threatened to hurt Porter if he dared to tell anyone.”

Finally Lucy let out a shaky breath as her mouth feel open.

“Oh and the ‘lottery’ money you're talking about?” Clark crossed his arms. “Yeah, that was from him selling Selina’s son to a mer collector.”

Clark could go on. The list of terrible things Antonio had done was endless, but given how pale Lucy had gotten, he stopped for her sake. Really, Clark didn’t blame Porter one bit for smiling at the news,

Lucy however seemed to be struggling immensely with the information, even going as far as to bring her hands to her head as though physically trying to keep herself together. Eventually she trained those steely eyes on him. “Are you telling me the God's honest truth right now?”

Clark held her stare. “I am.”

Lucy took a deep breath and lowered her arms. After a moment, she nodded, her lips pursed. “Well…” she whispered. “Good riddance, then.”

“You understand now why Porter wasn’t exactly sad from the news?”

Lucy shook her head. “God, if he killed Tom and threatened to hurt him; Porter has every right to want to piss in his urn.” Lucy said, before looking away with a wince. “But then again, if he killed himself maybe he was guilty about what he did...”

Clark pressed his lips together. “Yeah. Maybe.” He said non committedly.

“And the boys…” She muttered. “God, to think they were part of it… Hell, Colin used to help Tom on the ranch when it was calving season…”

“Antonio seemed like the ringleader.” Clark offered. “Colin at least seemed remorseful about the whole thing, as for Steve?” Clark shrugged. “I don’t know.”

The room fell silent as Lucy sat staring into space. Despite her vacant stare it was obvious her mind was anything but; you could practically see the wheels of her mind turning rapidly until eventually she took a deep breath and looked up at Clark. “That was a lot to take in.”

“Yeah, sorry Luce.” Clark said, pursing his lips. “If you want, we can go back to talking about Barbara?”

Lucy offered a smile at that at least. “She would be a much better choice of topic I must admit, but if I'm being honest, I think I'm a bit 'talked out' right about now.”

Clark offered a sympathetic smile. “That’s fine, Luce. I'll head out. Was good seeing you.”

“And you. Clark. Take care.”

As he turned to leave, he thought of Barbara and Lucy and as he did, a conversation he had with Porter months ago came back to him. For a moment, he didn’t know why, but he could hear Porter’s docile tone wash through his mind as the memory slowly came back to him.

“So no one else on the island is a mernan?”

“Oh no, I'm fairly certain there are a few of us but it’s not the kind of thing you go asking about unless you are a hundred percent certain you’re right. I can only sense other Pavos mernans personally, so if there were, say, an Algas mernan somewhere on the island, I wouldn't know.”

Clark turned back around to face Lucy. “Just one last question, Luce.”

She poked her head up from the book and quirked her head. “What is it, Clark?”

“Are there… other blackfins on the island? Aside from the Kyle’s, I mean.”

Lucy’s mouth curled downward ever so slightly. “Why do you ask?”

A mer poked his head above the water that looked horrifyingly familiar and not in the way that he was expecting.

He stared wide eyed at the mer.

Marcos' eyes stared back.

Clark pursed his lips together. “Let me rephrase that.” He murmured. “Is Marcos a blackfin?”

For a moment, Lucy's face remained guarded, though her lip betrayed her, curling downward with each second that passed until eventually she heaved a sigh. “He is, but he doesn’t know, and Sal doesn’t *want* him knowing.”

"So Sal's one, too?"

But Lucy ignored the question, lifting her finger up to point at him instead. “Listen Clark, I know you've taken Marcos under your wing, but with Sal sick and with Marcos trying to deal with it, he does *not* need to know about all this stuff right now, alright? So just… don’t bring it up to him.”

Clark nodded and without saying a word. He then reached for the door handle. “Thanks for telling me, Luce.”

He could see on her face that she wanted to say more, to reiterate what she had just told him, but perhaps something in his expression told her that would be pointless and instead she simply sent him a resigned smile. “Take care, Clark.”

With a final goodbye, he stepped out onto the street, his eyes trained towards the marina.

Chapter End Notes

Flops onto the floor Hullo there.

Sorry about the lack of update. Don't worry, I'm still here, slowly but surely continuing to add to my monolith of a fic.

As always, let me know your thoughts. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Catch you all next time x

Chapter 42

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Clark stared up at the sign in front of him, he wondered if what he was about to do was a good idea.

Short answer was that it wasn't, the long answer was far more complicated than that.

For one, how would he even broach the subject? He wasn't exactly close with Sal, and the idea of talking to him about this much less in a way that didn't make the man hate him even more was simply unfathomable. No, Clark just had to concede that no matter what he said he was most likely going to be called a lot of unpleasant things in Spanish.

He approached the doorway and found despite the open being door there was no one at the front desk. He stepped inside and contemplated calling out but thought better of it. He instead crept closer to the doorway leading into the living space and peeked his head inside.

He heard footsteps above him and when Clark turned to them he saw Marcos coming down the staircase. Perhaps due to not seeing Clark immediately, his expression was downcast, with red raw eyes and hair that was more than just a couple of missed showers greasy.

The moment he spotted Clark however, his lips curled upward into what Clark assumed was an attempt at a smile. "Clark." He said, his voice husky. "Long time no see"

The crushing weight of seeing Marcos like this, hit Clark suddenly. Sal, Lucy, and every other thought that was in his mind simply left and all that remained was that whilst he was out dealing with his own issues, Marcos was here dealing with his own.

Clark's eyes softened as he took in that tired face. "Are you okay?" He asked.

With those simple words whatever was holding Marcos upright must have snapped as he crumpled forward into Clark. The moment he did, several choked sobs wracked his body and Clark brought his arms up around his small frame, holding him close. “Hey, hey…” he whispered. “It’s okay.”

They stood like that for a while, until eventually Marcos grew quiet, and Clark’s shoulder became sufficiently damp. He gently eased back and took in Marcos' now reddened face. “I heard about your dad…” he said softly. “I know you must be hurting a lot right now, but I want you to know I’m here.”

Marcos huffed at that, a true smile touching his face for a second before crumpling back into a frown. He wiped his eyes and pulled back. “Thanks, I just…” he shook his head. “I don’t know how I feel right now.”

“I can imagine.”

Marcos nodded, making his way over towards the sofa and falling down into it. “It’s been hard taking care of dad. I thought I could handle it, and at first it was fine, but it’s like…” he looked up in thought. “The best way I can describe it is like waiting at the top of a roller coaster. I'm staring down at the ground, waiting for it to fall but it never falls. It feels like any moment the coaster is going to drop, and I don't know if I'm going to be relieved or terrified when it does.” He turned to Clark then, his eyes watering once more. “Does that make me a bad person?”

Clark approached Marcos, sitting down next to him, resting his arm along the back of the cushions. “No.” Clark said with a shake of the head. “What you’re going through is hard. Losing a parent is one thing, but watching helplessly as you slowly lose them is another.”

“Exactly.” Marcos said, his face curling into a frown. “It’s like he’s fading. Bit by bit.”

“And you are an amazing son for looking after him, despite how hard it must be.”

Marcos looked away, sniffling. “Thanks, Clark.”

At that, they grew quiet, as Clark looked around the room and took it all in. It hadn’t changed much since he was last here, with just as many photos and items lining the surfaces. He did notice one new addition though, a small radio like box with a blinking green light. He stared at it for a moment before his attention was pulled towards Marcos as he leant against his side.

“Thanks for checking up on me...” he said softly.

“Anytime.” Clark said, bringing his hand up to pat his head. “Which reminds me, there was something else I wanted to do whilst I was here.”

“And that is?” Marcos asked, sitting upright.

“I was hoping to see your dad.”

“My dad?” Marcos asked, quirking his head. “Why?”

“I want to talk to him about something.” Clark said. “I’ll only be a few minutes.”

Marcos however, looking unconvinced. “I don’t know. My dad doesn’t exactly want guests right now.” Clark could practically hear the words ‘*much less you* ’ tacked on at the end.

“I know, but it’s important. If he wants me out of the house, I'll leave, but I just want to talk to him.”

Marcos still looked unconvinced, but eventually he gestured to the stairs. “Second door on your right.”

Clark nodded and stood up, making his way up the stairs and down the corridor. He saw the same photo of Bianca and Marcos from before and paused for a moment looking at it. Maybe his hunch was wrong, maybe it was all a conscience and Sal would use his last breaths to yell at him.

Only one way to find out.

When he entered the bedroom, the first thing that caught him was the smell. It wasn’t bad, per say. It didn’t cause his nose to shrivel or for him to have to breathe from his mouth or anything like that. The

best way he could describe it was clinical, as though he had been transported from what could be considered a generic bedroom into a working hospital suite with little more than a scent.

He noticed Sal on the bed almost immediately. It wasn't exactly hard to miss him. Despite the room still looking like a normal bedroom, it was decidedly more bare than the rest of the house. In place of trinkets and furniture, were machines, including that same odd looking radio from downstairs as well as others that Clark couldn't even guess as to their purpose.

Sal cracked his eyes open and almost immediately he sent him a frown. "Damn it..."

"Hey." Clark said, offering a smile. "You're looking well."

The words slipped from Clark's mouth with little thought and as he said them, Sal's glower faltered and surprisingly, he laughed. It was a dry sound, accompanied with a few coughs, but it was enough to cause Clark to stifle a few of his own as he sat down in the chair beside the bed.

After Sal quieted down he let out a reedy breath before turning his now less hostile eyes towards Clark. "I take it you have a reason for coming here and bothering me?"

Clark clasped his hands together. "I do." He said as he took a deep breath. "I wanted to talk to you about it before I brought it up to Marcos."

Sal's eyes narrowed at that. "If you're asking what I think you're asking; the answer is no."

Clark raised a brow. "What did you think I'm asking?"

"For my blessing."

Clark's eyes blew wide as he sat back in his chair. "Why the Hell would I ask you that?"

"Well, what else could you come here asking me for?"

“Lots of things Sal!” Clark blurted. “Literally anything aside from ‘I want to marry your son.’”

“Then let me hear it!” Sal said forcefully, folding his arms as he glared at Clark.

“I--” Clark pressed his lips together and looked away. “I want to talk to you about the box you gave me.”

He chanced a look at Sal, and sure enough saw his glare was back. “You opened it.”

“No, I didn't.” Clark said quickly.

“Then what do you want to know?”

“I want to know what’s inside of it.”

“What is inside, is none of your concern.”

“But…” Clark looked away. “I think I know what is inside of it.”

Sal’s eyes narrowed. “Oh, do you?”

“*Not* because I opened it.” Clark said as he thought to the small stack of paper he’d seen within it. “It’s a letter, right?”

“Right. A letter to my son. *Not* to you.”

“But…” Clark murmured. “I think I know what you wrote in that letter.” Sal’s expression didn’t change and Clark steeled himself, sitting up higher as he did. “It's about his mother and brother, right? About Jaime?”

As Clark sat, he watched as Sal's face morphed from one emotion to the next. First was incredulity, then panic, then briefly what could only be described as anger so visceral it caused Clark to swallow, and then finally, a grim sort of acceptance that Sal must have perfected over these last few months. Without saying a word, Clark got his answer and he found himself nodding.

“I met him.” He said.

Sal’s lip curled upward as he looked away, his eyes watering. “How is he?”

“He’s safe now. I wont get into it all, but all that matters is that he’s safe with a Dr. Tompkins in Sacramento.”

Sal’s stare remained resolutely on the window. “I see.”

Clark turned his attention to the window as well, watching the clouds move across the sky. Eventually he took a deep breath and asked. “What exactly happened?”

Sal closed his eyes. “Bianca… had mer blood. When the boys were born, first came Marcos, and then came Jaime. When he came out, I didn’t know what to think, but as I panicked, Bianca explained it all to me. She said her abuela was a mer, so there was a chance, a very small chance, she could give birth to one, too.” He let out a sigh. “Things began to make sense then. Why she wanted a home birth, why she would sometimes look at Lucy or Jim and it was as though they were having a full conversation in silence.”

“But that still left us with what we were going to do with Jaime. Hiding a mer is one thing, but hiding a mer baby is another. How would we raise him in just our home? Without anyone finding out about him? About Bianca? About what they were? Bianca told me that half fins born to mernans often go to live with mer kin in the ocean, but Bianca's abuela had long since passed she didn’t know of any other blackfin pods to raise him. So, after many nights talking it over, she decided to leave and take Jaime to Paraíso.”

“Paraíso?”

“Her abuela had told her about it when she was a child. It's a cluster of small islands near Mexico. They say the water surrounding the islands is so turbulent that ships avoid it like the plague. But once you make it past the rough seas, you find islands and water so perfect you swear you have found paradise. On those islands, is a community of mernans and mers or all kin and species, living together as one pod.”

Clark’s eyes blew wide at the words. “That sounds…”

But Sal cut him off with a wave of the hand. “It sounds like an old wives tale to me, and I said as much to her at the time. It was something her abuela told her to get her to go to sleep late one night, and nothing more, but she was adamant it was real. She told me we could all go together, or…” he closed his eyes. “Or she would take Jaime and I would raise Marcos here.”

Clark frowned. “Why didn’t you go with them?”

He knew the moment he asked the question, the answer would take a moment to come. Sure enough, Sal lapsed once more into silence so complete Clark could hear a bird chirp from just outside the window. “When I was younger, I thought I had a reason for not going.” Sal said softly. “As I grew older however, more and more that reason faded until all I was left with was regret. I do remember being scared. Though what of, I don't know. Perhaps it was fear of the unknown, or fear of what my wife and children really were. I just knew I couldn't follow them, so I didn't.”

“So that was it?” Clark asked. “You never saw her again?”

“She told me she’d send a letter when she arrived, but…” he looked away. “She never did.”

“Maybe they don’t have a postal service on the island…” Clark said softly. “Or maybe she forgot.”

Sal offered a wry smile “Or, maybe the quake that hit just as her boat would have been sailing across the gulf of Mexico, got her.”

Clark folded his arms as he sat back. “You know there is an easy way to figure out which of us is right.”

“And that is?”

“Talking to Jaime.” He said resolutely. “I know where he is, I could…” He began. “I could take you to him.”

Sal huffed a laugh. “In case you went blind since walking in; I'm not in a state to go anyway.”

“I’ll bring him here, then.”

“No.”

“Why?”

Sal remained silent.

Clark levelled his stare. “Do you really want to die without meeting him? Without finding out what happened to your wife? You really want to spend the rest of your life lying in this bed instead?”

Some of his words must have hit their mark as Sal wilted, looking away. “What if… he hates me?”

“Why would he hate you?”

“I don’t know what life he has had. If Bianca was in it, or not. I don’t know how much pain I caused because I broke our family apart. And then there is Marcos. I *lied* to him.” Sal whispered. “For years, I told him that his mother without knowing it as certain, I told him that waves came into the marina and pulled her out to sea. For years I told him mers were evil, to avoid them, all to prevent him from finding out his heritage, from finding out my lie.” A tear slid down his cheek as he took a breath. “I

don’t want to die with my sons hating me, I don't want to die with that on my soul. After I am gone, whatever they think of me is there own business. But before then, if I must be a coward, so be it.”

“And I can understand that.” He began quietly. “I can understand fear paralyzing you. I’ve been there. Believe me. But luckily I had someone who pulled me out of my own fear, someone who helped me realize that things were going to be okay. Marcos might hate you for this, but it won’t be forever, he’ll understand once you explain it, and what’s more, I bet he’d love to meet Jaime.” Clark reached forward and set his hand down on the comforter near Sal's hand. “Despite your best efforts, Marcos doesn’t hate mers as much as you hoped he would.”

Sal let out a wistful sigh at that. “He’s too good, that’s why. I’m proud of him and I know Bianca would be, too.”

“So tell him.” Clark said. “Tell him and let me bring Jaime here. Please.”

This time when Sal grew silent, Clark could practically hear the thoughts swirling in his mind. He waited until one fell from his lips and tried to keep his expression neutral when the word he was hoping for came out. “Okay.”

Clark stood up and offered a crisp nod. “I'll send Marcos up and get Jaime. Don’t die while I'm out.”

“Haha.” Sal said, rolling his eyes. “You should be a comedian.”

Clark left the room before Sal could take it all back and made his way downstairs. “Marcos?” He called out. “You here?”

He looked around and saw the place was empty. He poked his head into the store and saw Marcos wasn’t there either. He frowned, focusing hard on his heartbeat and finding it a ways away, out in the ocean. “What the Hell?” He muttered to himself.

Then he heard a quiet cough coming from the couch.

Clark approached it cautiously and then saw something that made his stomach drop.

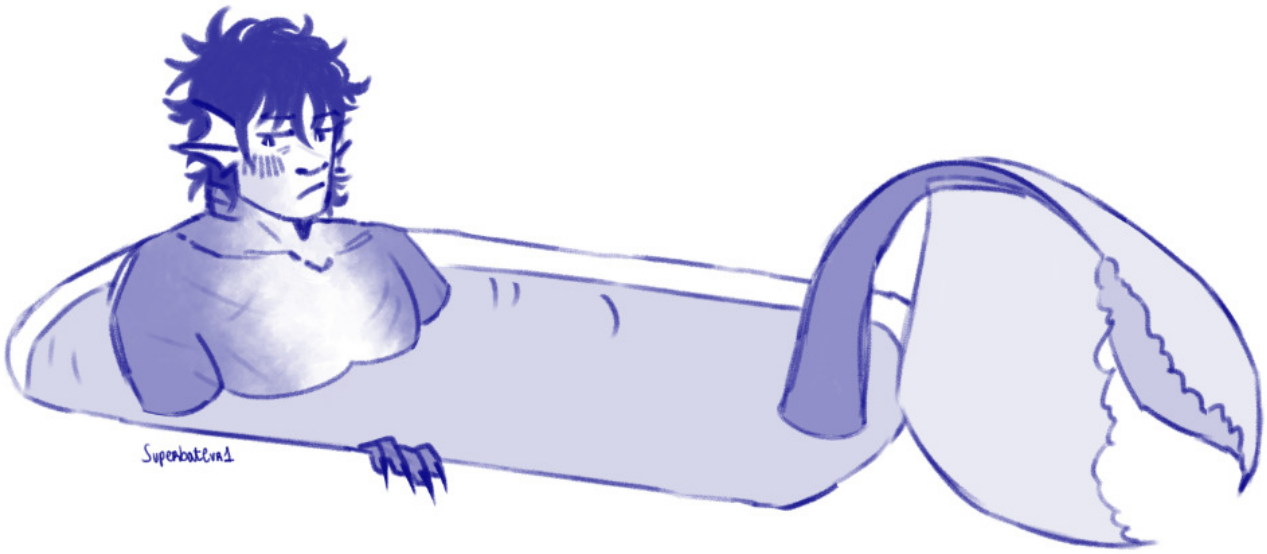
Sat on the couch cushion was the small radio from before, only now Clark understood what it really was.

It was a baby monitor.

The green light on it blinked up at him as he picked it up. Another cough came from the speaker, as well a few quiet mutterings in Spanish.

“Fuck.” Clark whispered.

Chapter End Notes



I want to give a big thank you to Superbatlvr1 for this super amazing drawing of Blue! Please go send him lots of love ❤️

Also, I know my updates have been sparse recently, but I've been in a slump I just can't seem to shake and I just haven't had the motivation to write. I finally decided to make this chapter and most likely the future ones shorter than I normally do just so that y'all won't have to wait as long for updates in the future.

Anyway, I hope this one was worth the wait. I know Blue isn't in it, but he will be in the next one (°ʖ°)

As always let me know your thoughts. Your kind words (and fanart 😏) really help in motivating me to get off my ass and write. Take care and see you all next time <3

Chapter 43

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Clark stood in the empty living room, he tried to come to terms with what had just occurred.

"Maybe he didn't hear anything." Clark muttered as he stared down at the monitor; its green light continuing to blink, as though taunting him. "Maybe he just wanted to get some air."

~~*Yes and maybe if you tell yourself that long enough it might actually become true.*~~

Clark grimaced, letting the monitor fall back onto the cushion with a soft thud. God, what was he thinking, of course Marcos had heard them and judging from the direction of his heartbeat, he was making a beeline for Sacramento as a result.

What he intended to do there, Clark didn't know and what's more, he didn't want to spend too long thinking about it lest he feel even worse about the situation in general. No, he knew what he needed to do, but the issue was what he had to do in the present moment, which was trying to explain what had just happened to Salvator.

Or, I could just not , he thought to himself. *Why stress him out unnecessarily? Just go get Marcos and you won't need to explain anything to Sal.*

~~*Yes, lying to a man on his deathbed sounds like a great idea. I hear people do it all the time.*~~

"God damn it…" Clark muttered, heading back upstairs. "Okay, just…"

But Clark didn't finish that thought as he eased open the door and peered inside. He found Salvator exactly where he had left him, the only difference being his eyes were now closed and his chest rose with slow regularity. Despite the frown he was wearing, he was definitely asleep.

“Oh thank fucking Christ.” Clark whispered as he shut the door once more. “I have time.”

He ran from the store, before pausing at the front. He couldn’t just leave it open, surely? He doubted anyone would rob the place in broad daylight, but then again, he didn’t exactly know all of the island residents well enough to assume they wouldn’t take advantage of such a situation.

There was also the issue of leaving Sal alone. Without Marcos around, what would Sal do should he wake and need something?

It was as he stood, staring up at the sign that he turned to face the marina and got an idea.

He ran across the boardwalk and burst into the shipping office.

“Porter!” He called out.

The man in question jolted at his name being called. He was standing by the desk of one of his employees as he turned to face Clark, his eyes wide in surprise. “Clark?” He asked. “What are you doing here?”

“I need a favour.” He said, gesturing for the man to approach. “Can you come outside for a second?”

Porter paused what he was doing and quietly spoke to his employee, setting the stack of paper he was holding onto her desk as he did. He then walked over to Clark and headed out the door with him. “Everything okay?” He asked.

“I need you to keep an eye on Sal for a little while.”

Porter frowned. “Why are you asking me to watch him? Where is Marcos?”

“He’s uh…” Clark pressed his lips together, his ears training in on the sound of a heartbeat across the

ocean. “Somewhere… the point is, I need to go get him and whilst I’m gone, I think there needs to be someone to keep an eye on Sal and I figured as you two are friends…”

Porter nodded quickly. “Of course I can watch him. But is Marcos okay? It’s not like him to run off without saying anything.”

“He’s okay.” Clark said slowly. “Look, I'll explain it all when I get back but I sort of need to get a move on. Are you good to keep an eye on Sal?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll let my office know I'll be over there until you or Marcos are back.” Porter's eyes became tinged with concern. “Does Salvator know Marcos is gone?”

Clark grimaced. “No… he doesn’t. If he asks, just say I'm with him, that should keep him calm. At least for the time being.”

“Okay, Clark.” Porter said, though his expression still looked slightly dubious. “Take care.”

As ran Clark towards where his boat was usually docked, he paused for a moment when he couldn’t find it. Just as his confusion mounted he let out a quiet expletive and made a U-turn, running up the main high-street. Of course. His boat was still at the Kyle’s.

Soon, he was outside their front gate. Just as he opened it and jogged past the front of the building, he saw a flash of red hair on the porch. He might have kept moving had the flash not chosen to speak.

“Clark!” Barbara called out, causing him to falter. “Where are you running off to?”

“Yeah, Clark.” Came Dick’s voice as he appeared from behind Barbara. Clark had barely noticed him, Hell if it hadn’t been for her hair, he doubts he would have even spotted Barbara.

“It’s a long story, I can't get into it. I just need to go somewhere.”

“Okay…” Dick said, cautiously. Just then, his expression grew panicked. “Is it something to do with dad? Did Leslie or mom call?”

“No." Clark said quickly. “I just- -” he looked away, and let out a quiet sigh. “Marcos has run away, and I think he's heading to Sacramento.”

Barbara and Dick both shared a look. “Why would he be going there?” Barbara asked, quirking her head. “What happened?”

“I told you it's a long story, so if you’ll excuse me--”

He didn’t wait to finish speaking, didn’t even wait to see if the pair had anything else to say. He resumed his run towards the boat, and once he was on there he didn’t so much as pause as he started it up and headed out into open water.

It was only as he got out into said open water, that he realized he wasn’t alone.

He let out a sigh. “Slade.” He called out, turning his head by a fraction. “What are you doing here?”

Eventually, he heard footsteps and Slade peeked out from the side of the doorway. “I was looking around.”

“Can I ask why?” Clark asked, staring the man down.

“I was curious.” Slade said, kicking his foot in what Clark could only assume was faux bashfulness. He then made his way inside the cockpit and sat down beside Clark. “I also didn’t think you’d be coming back here in such a rush.”

“And I thought you were 'checking on the boys'.”

“I *was* .” Slade said. “But then I got bored and your boat was right here, so..." He offered a shrug before turning his attention out towards the water. "Where are we even going right now?"

“I’m going to Sacramento.”

“Are you checking in on Bruce?”

“No, it’s a--” but Clark, knowing well enough by now that Slade was not one to leave things alone, *ever* , conceded with a sigh before even finishing his sentence. “It’s Marcos. He overheard me and his father talking and found out he’s a mernan. He’s now heading towards Leslie’s because one of the mers with her is his brother and I don’t know what he intends to do when he gets there.” Clark wiped his hand across his forehead, moving some of the now damp locks out of the way. “I just need to explain everything to him… Once I've done that, everything should be okay.”

Slade for the most part looked unbothered about the development, and simply sat back in his seat with a shrug. “What’s there to explain? Just give him the letter his dad wrote and you’ll be golden.”

Clark paused. “The letter?”

“Yeah, the one you mentioned.”

His eyes narrowed. “I didn’t mention a letter.”

“Oh.” Slade said, pressing his lips together. “Right.”

“You found the box.”

“I might have done.”

“And you opened it.”

“Potentially.”

Clark shook his head. “Jesus, Slade...”

“What? I thought it was something to do with *you* , I didn't realize it would be about half-fin babies and long lost wives.”

Clark however was still in disbelief, though not because he couldn’t believe Slade would do something like this but because he wasn’t as angry as he knew any sane person should be at having had their privacy violated. If anything he was more annoyed at how much Slade had desensitized him to these sorts of things. “I just… I can't believe you.” Clark said, trying to force some fire into his voice. “Where do you get off going through my shit?”

Slade just shrugged. “I was bored.”

“You asshole.” Clark said in lieu of not knowing what else he could say.

“Also it technically wasn’t *yours* , right?”

“That doesn’t make it any better.”

At that, they both lapsed into an uneasy silence. Though Clark was certain the unease was solely on his end as Slade didn’t look bothered by the lack of conversation in the slightest, opting to sit back in his chair and doze off instead. Clark focused his attention out onto the waters ahead, and after what felt like an excruciating long length of time, he spotted the docks of Sacramento off in the distance.

As they got closer, Clark trailed his eyes along the many boats lining the marina and frowned. “I don’t see his boat.”

Slade cracked his eye open and sat up. Almost immediately, he nodded his head. “I do.”

“You do?”

“Yup.” Slade said, pointing towards a specific portion of the marina.

“Oh.”

“Yup.”

Clark steered towards it, pulling in beside Marcos’ boat. After docking, he jumped ashore and stared up at the sign reading ‘WINTERGREEN SHIPPING’ and pressed his lips together.

“I guess I should be thankful.” He said, turning to Slade as he came up alongside him. “Rose should be keeping him occupied, at least.”

“She’s probably making fun of his hair.” Slade said conversationally as he walked past him into the office.

As Clark joined him inside, he felt his stomach drop as he noticed that the place was empty, with nary a glaring Rose in sight. He looked around frantically, hoping the pair might just be hiding somewhere nearby just to mess with him. When he realized that wasn’t the case, he whirled on Slade. “Where are they?”

Slade frowned. “You're aware I came in with you, right? You know just as much as I do.”

Clark let out a harsh breath. “Okay, but she is *your* daughter, don’t you--” But before Clark could continue, the door behind the front desk opened and Wintergreen stepped out from within.

“Slade. Clark. I thought it was you.” He said, with a bob of the head. “What brings you both here?” He asked as he came forward and sat himself down on the empty seat.

“Do you know where Rose went?” Clark asked quickly.

Wintergreen nodded. “Yes, she took a boy who came in here to see Leslie.”

Slade frowned. “She did what now?”

“Well, it was all a little strange. He parked up and came in as I was going over something with Rose and at first, Rose gave him the Wintergreen treatment, but before long we both sensed he was kin. His sync wasn’t active, but he was a blackfin alright. Then he started asking where Leslie Tompkins was and that just sealed the deal. Rose said she’d take him there.”

“Wait.” Slade said, his confused expression remaining. “You’re telling me Rose… My *daughter*…. volunteered… to *help* someone?”

“Yup.” Wintergreen said. “Believe me, I was as confused as you.”

“Well, alright then.” Slade said to himself as he folded his arms, “So I guess Hell has frozen over... Wonder if I'll see a pig fly next?”

As Slade looked up in thought, Clark found his patience wearing thin. “Are you done? Can we go now or do you have anything else you want to add? Maybe a full blown soliloquy?”

Wintergreen huffed a laugh at that as he gestured towards the back room. “Take the tunnel, that will get you there quicker than walking the streets.”

“Let’s go.” Clark said, not bothering to wait to see if Slade was following. When he reached the elevator, Slade pulled up beside him and soon they were deep underground.

Without wasting any time, they followed the tracks until they reached the other elevator. Once there, they entered and made their way up.

The climb upwards was where Clark felt his heart begin to race. When they were walking, he was able to keep his nerves at bay by focusing intently on the sound of his footsteps in the dirt. As they slowly rose upwards however, all he could do was think.

It was then he became aware of the fact that they had not in fact beaten Rose and Marcos here and what's more, he had no idea what he was actually going to say to him once they got there.

The doors slid open and the smell and sound of the sea hit him. He marched out and scanned the several pools before him.

He spotted Selina first in a lounger along the side, sporting the same bikini and sunhat she had the last time Clark had seen her. She had a book on her lap, but her attention was instead pulled towards the centre of the room; watching the group that had gathered there intently.

The group consisted of the other blackfins, Rose, and lastly, Marcos.

There he sat in the middle of them all, his lip becoming a makeshift chew toy as all the mers stared at him. Some spoke aloud, mostly the blond one, Stephanie, but for the most part they remained silent though Clark was well aware they were in fact conversing. In these moments, Marcos' would look confused, fearful even, but then he would calm, and Clark noticed why that was.

There was a mer tucked in close beside him, and Clark recognised him quickly. It was Jaime. He was holding Marcos' hand, and whenever his expression grew pained, that hand would tighten and the silent conversation would resume. Clark turned his head to Slade. "I take it…"

"His sync was activated." Slade nodded.

Clark didn't know whether it was relief or trepidation he was feeling. "I see."

Slade walked up to his side and slapped his back. "Look at it this way, now you don't have to explain anything. They're doing it all for you."

Clark grimaced, it was definitely trepidation.

“Just leave him be for now.” Slade said, clearly wise to Clark’s unease. “He’s catching up on a whole lot of stuff and you don’t need to get in the middle of that.” At that, Slade caught Selina’s attention, sending a quick wave her way. “Anyway, I’m going to talk with Selina. Don’t do anything stupid.”

Clark didn’t even have time to respond before Slade was walking away. Despite no one seeing him, he rolled his eyes and p roceeded to survey the room in search of the only other person he wanted to find here.

He spotted Bruce in one of the back pools, asleep.

“Of course...” Clark muttered with a smile.

As he approached, he stayed to one side, hoping to not interrupt whatever was going on between Marcos and the other mers. Thankfully he seemed to go completely unnoticed, up until he reached the pool in which Bruce was asleep. He crouched down, splashing the surface with his hand as he did. “Blue… Wake up.”

It didn't take long for the mer to do just that as his eyes fluttered open and with a low call he swam up to the surface, bursting out from the water and nearly pushing Clark over in the process. “Easy." Clark laughed as Bruce came up alongside him. “You’re gonna get me all wet.”

As though taking that as a challenge, Bruce whacked his tail across the water sending a small tidal wave onto Clark’s shorts.

Clark looked down at the damp fabric and grimaced. “Thanks for that.”

Bruce’s grin only grew. ‘W H Y A R E Y O U H E R E ?’

Clark watched the hand movements before his eyes flicked towards the group in the middle of the room. “I came here to make sure Marcos wasn’t gonna do anything stupid, which as of yet, he

hasn't."

Bruce, catching the look, turned his head. Judging by his focus and the way his ears twitched, Bruce was privy to what exactly was occurring before him and after a moment he let out a low grumble and turned back to face Clark.

At the sound, Clark let out a huff. "Wow Bruce, don't look too excited now."

Bruce let out another grumble. 'I T H O U G H T Y O U W E R E H E R E F O R M E.' He signed.

Clark's face grew sympathetic. "It's only been a day, B. Didn't think you'd miss me that much."

Bruce frowned. 'D I D Y O U N O T M I S S M E ?'

"Of course I did." Clark muttered as he reached for Bruce and pulled him close. "I slept like shit last night without you…"

That at least caused a small smile to touch Bruce's lips as his tail swished from side to side. 'G O O D.' He signed.

"I'm glad my misery is a comfort to you."

At this, Bruce brushed his lips against Clark's neck, a gentle trill leaving him as he did. The pulse in his groin that gesture caused had Clark reeling almost immediately, his eyes going to the others in the room as he eased Bruce back. "Hey, now..." He said, for lack of knowing what else to say.

Apparently Bruce was not oblivious to his plight and judging by his mischievous smirk, he only sought to elevate it. He darted for Clark's neck once more, and this time brought his teeth out to nibble across his collar bone.

Clark hissed a breath and this time wasn't so gentle as he pushed Bruce back. "We're not exactly alone here, B."

Bruce looked around as though only now noticing the fact they did indeed have company. ‘F O L L O W M E,’ he signed before shimmying his way across the tiles.

Clark knew it was a bad idea to follow, but like most bad ideas Clark couldn't help but jump head first into it. He gave Marcos one last fleeting glance before following Bruce across the room and through an arched doorway.

It turned out that the facility was even bigger than Clark had realized as the arch led into another room filled with pools and areas to lounge. This one however was empty and Clark voiced as much as he surveyed it. “Does no one like using these pools?” He asked.

‘T H E Y ‘ R E C O L D E R.’

“Oh?" Clark said, crouching over and touching the water. Sure enough, he retracted his hand with a wince after just a second. “That’s not just cold, B…” he shuddered. “That’s freezing.”

Bruce nodded and with a quick smile he slid into the water head first causing Clark to yell, “Bruce!”

After a quick circling of the pool, the mer popped back out and the sight of him nearly took Clark’s breath away.

His ears were no longer their usual navy blue tone and were instead black. As he swam to the edge of the pool and pulled himself out, the rest of his body was just the same; with inky black scales now spanning all the way across his back down to the very tip of his tail.

Given how distracted Clark was, he barely noticed Bruce slowly make his way towards him. Therefore he was *not* prepared for when the mer pushed at his shins, causing him to fall and hit the ground.

But before he could register the sudden pain in his ass, Blue was on him, and the feeling of the water on his hands was nothing compared to the mer shaped ice cube now resting on top of him.

“Jesus, Bruce!” Clark couldn't help but squeal as he tried to shake him off. “Get off me ! ”

But Bruce's grip remained tight as he grinned up at Clark. Eventually the ambient temperature of the room as well as Clark’s own body managed to get Bruce back down to a normal temperature, turning his scales blue once more in the process. That still didn't change the fact that Clark was now damp *and* cold.

“Thanks for that, hon.” Clark muttered. “I can now see why no one else wants to be here.”

Bruce’s tail swished to the side and in the same movement he laid down beside Clark, stretching his arms up and revealing the slight swell of his pale stomach.

As well as the slit of pink right below it.

Clark quickly looked away, his face growing hot.

Clark tried to will the heat he was feeling away. After all, now was not the time. They were not alone, for one, and given Bruce was not exactly known for being quiet at the best of times, this was shaping up to be a *terrible* idea. However given Clark's penchant for diving head first into them, all it took to get him to look back at Bruce was a gentle tug on his shirt.

Slowly, Clark turned from the water back towards the mer and when he did he swallowed thickly. Blue's eyes were half lidded as he watched Clark intently, his lip slipping between his teeth as he swayed from side to side across the tiles, trilling quietly. The movement did everything to bring Clark’s attention to his midsection as well as the rapidly growing sliver of pink he was seeing. It didn’t take long for Bruce’s cock to become fully unsheathed and when it did, Clark bit his own lip hard enough he was sure it was now bleeding.

Clark let out shaky breath, his attention briefly going to the other room and the simple archway separating them. “This isn’t exactly private,” he whispered.

But Blue kept moving, kept wiggling his hips until Clark let out a sharp breath and pulled off his shirt in one movement. “This is going to be quick, alright? I don’t want to get caught.”

The grin that spread across Bruce's face the moment Clark spoke could not be understated. He welcomed Clark's body against his and Clark started to kiss across his gills up to his lips. Once there, Clark began unzipping his shorts, keen on keeping them on. If he did get walked in on, the last thing he wanted was to be completely naked.

He reached down to Bruce's slit, his finger finding the hole beneath his cock. He pressed inside of it, but the sound Bruce made at the intrusion caused him to stop, his face growing ever warmer. "You need to be quiet, B."

But Bruce apparently didn't get the memo as upon Clark's hesitation, began to growl. Clark took a deep breath. "Bruce… Your *son* is out there. Do you really want him to know what we're doing in here?"

At that, Bruce looked away, offering a grumble in response. Knowing that was as good as he was going to get, Clark found Bruce's slit once more and tried to keep his movements quick so as to keep the mers moans to a minimum, and thankfully either from his words or his movements, Bruce's bit down on his lip, stemming the flow of moans somewhat adequately as a result.

Once he deemed Bruce ready, Clark brought his fingers away and lined himself up, his cock hovering over Bruce's.

Perhaps feeling the heat, the pink limb wrapped around Clark's cock not even a moment later, and the pressure from its hold caused Clark's head to fall back as a groan practically erupted from him. He could stay like this, and he was sure Bruce could too, but one look down at Bruce's flushed face caused his body to make a decision on his minds behalf.

He eased Bruce's cock away and slid inside, the wet warmth developing him completely as he did. Bruce clenched around him and Clark couldn't help but gasp at the sensation.

"God, you feel amazing…" Clark breathed out.

Whatever self-control Clark had quickly evaporated the moment he began to thrust. This was simply something that no man would ever be able to show restraint towards. Bruce was too warm, too slick, too, well, Bruce. Something about the man's hands on his back, the feel of his claws and teeth, the way his tail practically thrashed between his legs, it was all too much and eventually Clark felt himself moan louder than he knew was sensible and perhaps seeing that as an invitation, Bruce did much the same.

It wasn’t long till he came. Thankfully, he was able to do that quietly by burying himself into the crook of Bruce’s neck and using his flesh to stifle the sounds. Bruce didn’t have such a luxury, and as such, the near scream he let out was either going to be perceived for what it was or maybe they’d everyone would just assume Clark was trying to murder him.

Either way, Clark took several deep breaths and upon hearing approaching footsteps, had a decision to make. One, get caught with his cock out or two, hide what they were doing as best as he could.

He chose the latter, and with his orgasm still clouding his better judgement, he grabbed Bruce's haunches and slid them both into the nearby pool.

Almost immediately, Clark yelped, causing bubbles to flow from his mouth. It wasn’t that it was so cold it hurt, it was more the surprise of it. After all, space was cold, but flying up into it was always a gradual thing as opposed to a sudden change. Going straight from the warmth of Bruce to this was like a sucker punch and as such, he burst from the water and scrambled for the side, holding himself up and trying to will the warmth back into his limbs.

He chose to take stock of his body in that moment; his legs were numb, as were his fingers but the real causality were his balls, which were now making a home for themselves in his chest cavity given how far they had retreated.

Not even a moment later, Leslie poked her head in through the archway. “Is everything alright in here?” She asked.

“Yup.” Clark yelled, waving his head. “Bruce just dragged me into the pool.”

“Oh.” Leslie said and the way she smiled told Clark that she believed him and what’s more, that the lie wasn’t exactly far-fetched. “I was worried that you slipped and hurt yourself." Leslie then gestured to one of the shelves lining the room. " Should I get you a towel?” She asked. “Even if you’re Superman, I can't imagine being in there is all too comfortable.”

Clark nodded and thankfully remembered why he dunked himself in the pool in the first place before getting out. He tucked his now thoroughly flaccid cock back into his pants and then climbed out. Leslie approached him and the moment he felt the flurry warmth of the towel on his back, he let out a sigh. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” She said, before her eyes went to Bruce swimming through the underwater tunnels connecting all the pools at a brisk pace. “I see he’s perked up.”

“Yeah…” Clark said, his cheeks growing warm despite how cool he still felt.

“I know he hates being cooped up in here, but it’s only for a few more days.”

“What about the other mers?” Clark asked, turning to her. “What about them?”

Leslie made a face. “Well I was going to say the same thing, but I just let one of them go, so...”

Clark frowned. “You what?”

“I don't know if you saw when you got here, but Rose brought a young man here not too long before you arrived. She introduced us, and he told me that he was a mernan and what’s more, that his brother was in my care. The other mers became curious and came out of the water, and when they did, Jaime rushed forward and pulled the boy down to the ground and activated his sync. They all started talking after that and then, Marcos, I think was his name, asked if he could take Jaime to see their father in Cottonwood. I voiced my concerns but Slade told me he would go along with them to make sure Jaime would be okay. I told Slade to promise me he’ll bring Jaime back here by tomorrow evening to resume his treatment, but--”

“Wait a second--” Clark said, turning his attention to the other room and confirming with his own eyes that there were indeed three people now missing. “They’re gone?”

“For now. I don’t know if that Marcos boy will come back, but I expect Slade to make good on his promise and bring Jaime back. Withdrawal is a hard thing for a mer to cope with on their own.”

Clark looked down at his hands. “I see…”

“Anyway, it’s almost feeding time. Are you staying for dinner or will you be heading out soon?”

“Is it just raw fish on offer, or?”

Leslie smiled. “It’s fish for the mers and pie for us.”

Clark offered a nod. “Pie sounds great.”

After eating, Leslie offered Clark a cot for the night. He debated saying no, but the memory of how poorly he slept last night came back to him and he instead said yes.

The cot wasn’t exactly comfortable, but as the artificial lights of the room dimmed recreating the ambience of night, Clark found himself growing tired. He closed his eyes but not long after, felt a wet presence beside him.

He cracked an eye open. “You’re kidding right?” Clark muttered as he gestured around the room. “Just look at how many pools you can sleep in.” They were still in the cold room, with all the other mers opting, quiet rightly, to sleep in the warm pools for the night.

But Bruce simply pawed at his hand some more.

With a sigh, Clark brought his arm up. “Alright, get in, you gremlin.”

At that, Bruce grinned and slid into the cot beside him, testing just how much weight it could hold as he did. Bruce snuggled up against Clark’s neck and let out a breathy sigh. Clark then lowered his arm back down, wrapping it around Bruce. He then closed his eyes once more and sleep came not too long after.

Chapter End Notes

Behold. Sexy times to make up for the hiatus. 🙌

Trying to get back into the swing of writing is hard. I'm getting there though. Uni is starting back up soon, and I wish I had been more productive over the summer but it was also nice to just chill and play video games, ngl.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Lemme know your thoughts and I'll catch you all next time <3

Chapter 44

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 18th 2016

As it turns out, sleeping in a cot with the dead weight that is Bruce on my chest all night has resulted in my neck clicking every time I move. So that's fun.

I ended up staying at Leslie's till Slade reappeared and surprisingly enough, he made good on his promise and Jaime was with him. The kid looked a little out of sorts, but I don't exactly know him well enough to pry. I'll just have to talk to Marcos next time I see him. I just hope everything went alright.

When I got back to Solitude, Kon, Kara and Diana had made good on their own promise and had come by to check on me. It was actually nice to see them. Told them that Bruce and the mers were doing alright and that I'm gonna go back to Leslie's in a few days to check up on Bruce. We had grilled fish for dinner.

October 22nd 2016

Went to Leslie's earlier. All the mers have been cleared to go home. I figured they'd have all been happy to hear it, but if anything, it was the opposite. It was like none of them knew where they were gonna go. Well, that was until Tim voiced that his tank was big enough for them all and with Slade's being built next door, it was only gonna get bigger. I don't know how Selina is gonna feel about the sudden influx of mers in her home, but hey, at least I'm not gonna be the one who has to tell her.

Bruce is now back on Solitude with me. He found a half-rotten dolphin carcase along the beach earlier and has been picking at it all day. He just tried to come inside covered in what I can only describe as 'dolphin juice', and I promptly shut the door in his face. He's under the jetty sulking now, but I don't think he's too mad. I guess I'll find out soon if he is.

~~The little shit threw its liver at the door.~~ Turns out it was a spleen. He signed it at me when I threw it back at him telling him not to throw livers at people and he's been making fun of me for not knowing the difference ever since.

-

~~Can I take him back to Leslie's?~~

October 30th 2016

I felt Bruce's stomach today. I wasn't expecting much, but when I put my hand there I could feel all the babies wiggling inside. I try not to peak at them, but I can't help it. They look like little blobs still, but I can see their hands. I think one even has a tail.

November 1st 2016

Diana stopped by again today. I told her I was taking Bruce to visit Selina and the other mers on Cottonwood and she asked if she could come along to see how they were all doing.

It also meant that she finally met Selina, and I really should have been more prepared for what that meant given what Slade had told me about the woman.

Before I knew it Selina was hanging off of Diana in a <u>very</u> revealing dress. I don't even know when Selina changed into it as she was wearing jeans when we got there. I also don't think I have ever seen Diana so red. She looked like a tomato by the time we were leaving. I teased her the whole way back and she kept telling me to shut up.

I missed talking to her.

November 5th 2016

So Bruce's pregnancy cravings are worse than I had anticipated. I knew it was gonna be weird, but what I just put on a plate for him was so bad that I am writing this on the beach because I cannot be in the same room as him as he eats it.

He wanted chocolate spread smeared over the last chunk of rotten dolphin he had.

I had to get a jar of the spread from Lucy as I didn't have any on hand. I told her what it was for and she told me to shut up before she threw up. Barbara was there, too. She seemed less horrified at the idea but I think that's just 'cause she has a better poker face than Lucy.

I also bumped into Marcos near the marina as I was heading to my boat. We didn't really get a chance to talk as he was in a rush but he seemed good. Still looked tired, though.

Anyway, back to the dolphin. I got home, Bruce gave me the chunk, it was green , and I got a knife out and tried to not vomit as I covered it in chocolate spread.

I think Bruce has finished eating it now. I might leave him alone for a bit, though. I worry if I smell it on his breath I will just keel over, then and there.

-

We just kissed and I swear to God he burped in my face on purpose. I want to die. It smelt like death .

November 9th 2016

Clark had hoped for a peaceful day of reading, but he should have known the moment he saw Slade's boat on the horizon that wasn't going to happen.

He let out a sigh as he turned to Bruce, who happened to be dozing in the tub. "Slade's coming." He said. When Bruce didn't stir, he got out of his chair and crouched down beside the tub, resting his hand on Bruce's belly as he did. "Hon?"

Bruce let out a quiet grumble, his eyes remaining firmly closed. Clark smiled. "Slade's coming," He repeated.

Another grumble was Bruce's response.

Clark waited a moment to see if Bruce would deign to open his eyes but when they remained firmly closed he got up with a sigh. "Alright. I'll go talk to him, I guess."

It wasn't that Clark didn't want to speak to the man. If anything they had a lot to talk about. For one, as Bruce's pregnancy progressed, Clark couldn't help but be reminded of the conversation they'd had almost a month ago.

"Napier collects mers that are the rarest of the rare. Mers you wouldn't just be able to go to the ocean and find. And I can think of no better rare breed to offer him than a Kryptonian half fin."

He didn't like the idea then and he certainly hasn't grown any fonder of it as the day dawns ever nearer. Slade, perhaps sensing Clark's apprehension, hadn't been keeping him up to date with everything that was going on and for that, Clark was grateful. He didn't want to know about Hadal. He didn't want to know about the other collectors Slade might have learnt about and he certainly didn't want to know about Napier and what he had been doing to Bruce's sons.

Clark grimaced. The fact that he had known and hadn't told Bruce was going to backfire on him immeasurably and he knew it. He had thought about telling Bruce for that exact reason, but every time he meant to, Bruce would look at him with eyes that had seen far too much pain in recent memory and Clark knew he couldn't bear to be the one to add on top of that.

So he kept his mouth shut. Slade could be the one to tell him and Clark would just have to deal with whatever fallout came his way as a result of keeping quiet when that happened.

As he watched Slade draw nearer he couldn't help but wonder if that day had finally come.

The sound of churning water grew louder and when it ceased Clark stepped out of the cabin and out onto the beach. He waved to Slade as he pulled up beside the dock and turned off the ignition. He jumped onto land and made his way to Clark. "How's it going?" He asked with a bob of the head.

Clark shrugged a shoulder, gesturing into the cabin behind him. "Bruce is napping and I was just reading. What are you doing here?"

Slade cocked his head and gestured down the beach. Clark knew at that moment what they were going to talk about and perhaps because of it, it took a moment for him to follow after Slade.

Once they had walked a fair distance, Slade pulled out a cigarette and lit it up, turning to face Clark when he did. "You remember what we talked about on the sub? About Napier?"

Clark reluctantly nodded.

"Well, in a couple of days we need to send the letter to him and I wanted to make sure you were still on board with the plan."

Clark made a face. "I didn't think I had a choice in the matter."

Slade remained silent.

"Look, I'm not happy with it, but I'm not the expert here. If you and Bruce think it will work, then that's good enough for me."

“Yeah…” Slade let out a long breath, smoke pouring from between his lips as he looked back at the cabin. “He’s gonna be pissed we kept this from him, you know.”

Clark grimaced.

“Ah well, no sense delaying the inevitable.” Slade said as he took one last breath of his cigarette before throwing it down into the sand. “Let's go, boy scout.”

By the time they had returned to the cabin, Bruce was more awake though that wasn’t saying much. He still looked half asleep but at least his eyes were now open. “Bruce.” Slade said. “We gotta talk.”

Despite how sleepy he appeared only a moment ago, Slade's words had their intended effect and Bruce sat up, his face now concerned as he offered a quiet trill.

“No ones dead.” Slade said quickly as he held up his hands. “We just gotta talk about some of the things we found in Hadal’s sub.”

Bruce looked between the two of them, his eyes narrowing.

Slade looked away. “I found some letters between Hadal and an auction owner called Jack Napier. I don't know how much you know about him, Bruce, but he's bad news. I've spent years trying to find him and I've never had any luck.” He looked down at his own hands. “The point is that in the letters Napier talks to Hadal about some of the mers he has in his collection and I think… no, I *know* that… Damian and Terry are alive.”

Like an electric current struck him, Bruce jolted upright and scrambled from the tub towards Slade, his teeth bared. “Whoa whoa. Calm down!” Slade yelled as he crouched down, grabbing Bruce's shoulders and holding him firmly in place. “Calm down and listen to me, you’re no good to anyone if you strain yourself!”

Bruce's eyes were wide, his pupils narrowed into slits as he took deep breaths. He turned to Clark, his lip curling downwards as he did. Despite not hearing his words, he could feel the accusation in that face alone. Clark couldn't help but look away.

“Look, Clark didn't tell you because I told him not to." Slade said firmly. “You were stuck in the tank, and then things were touch and go with the babies so I decided to keep this from you until we had a concrete plan. It was my decision, alright? Be mad at me.”

Bruce shook himself away from Slade's hands with a growl, but realizing he didn’t exactly have anywhere to go in the small cabin, pushed him aside and crawled out onto the sand. Clark went to run after him, but Slade stopped him. “Don't. He just needs to blow off steam.”

Clark made a face. “I don't want him doing something reckless.”

Slade let out a mirthless laugh. “You do not know Bruce, then.” He shook his head. “Wreckless is his M.O.”

That did nothing to quell Clark’s concern. He watched Bruce slide into the surf and swim away, fighting the urge to jump in his boat and follow after him. Slade however must not have been done with his attempts at comfort as he rubbed Clark’s back in what he assumed was meant to be a soothing manner. “He just needs to calm down. When he has, he’ll come back and we can talk about everything. Don't worry, Clark. He’ll be fine. I know he’s pregnant, but he's still Bruce.”

Clark didn't measure how long it took for Bruce to come back with time. He measured it by the entire pack of cigarettes Slade ended up smoking, by the five chapters of his book he re-read, then re-read thanks to not taking anything in the first time. With each press of a wave against the beach, he would look out the window and check if Bruce was amongst the sea foam. As night began to fall, Clark found his patience waning and he stood up, walking out the door as though this new perspective would cause Bruce to reappear sooner.

Slade ended up following him. Without any more cigarettes to smoke, he had turned to biting at the dry skin on his lips. “Any minute now.” He repeated for what had to be the hundredth time.

Clark didn’t know how long they ended up watching the water, but they’d gone from standing in the doorway to sitting on the sand. Clark’s attention never left the water whilst Slade had moved on from dry skin to making castles in the sand that he would knock over once he had deemed them tall enough. It was at some point after the tenth castle's destruction that Bruce reappeared.

It took Clark a moment to recognize him. Even though he was staring at the surf, what first appeared out of the water was not the tuft of black hair and blue ears he was expected and was in fact the head of a shark.

Clark frowned at the sight before the shark began to move side to side in a strange way and only as it moved closer did Clark realize the shark was in fact not alive and the movement was from something pushing it up out of the water.

“Jesus Christ." Clark muttered. Slade pulled his attention away from the current pile of sand he was working.

“Tiger shark.” He said conversationally, cocking his head. “Not bad.”

Clark didn’t bother responding as he stood up and rushed to Bruce who had managed to get the shark out of the water, leaving it splayed out on the sand. With each wave, blood seeped from the several bite marks and cuts along the shark. Clark’s eyes slid from the red up towards Bruce. He had cuts and scrapes of his own, but compared to the shark it was nothing. It was his expression that caught Clark, though. It was still thunderous and Clark could feel the anger radiating off of him but hey, at least he was back.

“How was your swim?” Clark asked.

Bruce growled.

“I see, I see.” Clark said with a nod. He had a sneaking suspicion Bruce had imagined either he or Slade as the now dead shark beside him. He tried to think of how to rectify the situation. “You want me to cook you something?” Clark asked hopefully. “Do you want some chocolate spread to go with your shark?”

Despite his anger, Bruce's ears switched at the question and he looked away, his cheeks growing pink. He offered a small nod.

“Alright then.” Clark said, counting that as a victory. He held out his hand. “Gimme what you want coated.”

He should have been prepared for what Bruce was about to do, and yet he found his stomach lurch as Bruce stuck his hand inside one of the many slits along the shark's abdomen and rooted around inside. He pulled out a mass of organs and lifted them up towards Clark who had no choice but to grab them.

He turned around and saw Slade standing up as he did. Slade cocked his head at the organs in Clark's hands but didn't question what he was doing, perhaps due to Clark's pallid expression.

Once the organs were plated up with a smear of chocolate spread, Clark went back outside and handed the plate to Bruce who began eating it with gusto. He wondered if he was alone in his horror but one look at Slade told him that no, this was not normal, and yes, it was indeed horrifying.

"That looks interesting, Bruce." Slade said evenly as he sat down in front of Bruce. Clark quickly joined him.

Bruce didn't bother to respond, choosing to continue gnawing at the chocolate coated organ.

They waited for him to finish up. Mostly because neither man found they could speak whilst they watched Bruce devour his meal. After he was done, Bruce wiped his face and looked up at the pair. Thankfully, he looked less angry.

"Alright." Slade said as he clasped his hands together. " Now I know you're mad, but like I said, we had our reasons for keeping this from you till now."

Bruce let out a quiet growl but otherwise didn't comment.

"The fact is that Napier has the boys and we need to figure out how we're gonna get them back. Napier is famously reclusive and it's gonna take something that even he can't say no to and when I spoke to Clark about it all I realised we already have such a thing."

Bruce looked between the two of them, raising an eyebrow. 'W H A T ?'

Clade pursed his lips together, clearing his throat. "Your babies, Bruce. Napier would lose his mind at the idea of adding a Kryptonian half fin to his collection."

Clark didn't know whether to be thankful or concerned when Bruce's face twisted into a scowl. He supposed he was thankful that Bruce wasn't on board with the idea of using their children as bait but then again, if Bruce wasn't on board, all of a sudden Clark wasn't either.

"I'm not suggesting we actually trade them, Bruce." Slade ground out. "It's just to lure Napier out, to get him to tell us where his base is. He only collects the rarest of the rare, and what's rarer than a Kryptonian half fin? The only fin of its kind in existence? He wouldn't say no and you know it. The point is that once we've tempted him into meeting up, we'll know where he is and then we'll be able to save the boys."

Bruce let out a trill as his head bobbed in a way that told Clark he was syncing with Slade. Clark watched the two as they exchanged words and when they were done he turned to Slade. "What did he say?"

"Bruce is suggesting using himself as bait again. He says that as he's an abyssal fin that can give birth, he's rare enough for Napier to want, even if he already has two other abyssals." After speaking to Clark, he turned his attention back to Bruce. "The problem with that is that Napier wouldn't believe that Hadal would want to trade the golden goose over one of its eggs. With you, Hadal would be able to make as many blackfins and half fins as he wanted and there is no way he'd trade that for anything."

"What if…" Clark began before grimacing at his own thoughts. "Never mind."

"No, no." Slade said, turning to him. "We need ideas, so let's hear it."

"Well, it's just what you said." Clark began looking between the two of them. "Bruce can give birth and Hadal wants a fleet of blackfins. If Napier has two male abyssal fins, it would stand to reason that if Hadal wanted more abyssal fins, he'd ask about the idea of his and Napier's fins…" He looked away. "Mating."

He expected looks of contempt at the suggestion but Slade only nodded. "True." He looked at Bruce. "What do you think of that one? Babies are out of the equation this way."

Clark looked at Bruce, and saw him contemplating his words. Once he had, he looked at Clark, concerned.

Slade nodded. “We already have a plan for how to get Clark through the door. Napier doesn’t know that Kryptonite kills. We can tell him it does whatever we want it to, and in our case, we’ll say it controls Kryptonians. Clark would be Hadal’s thrall and do whatever he says. Once he’s through the door and we have eyes on Napier and his mers, we can subdue him.”

“The same way you did Hadal?” Clark asked.

Slade made a face. “Ordinarily I would say yes, but I was wondering if you’d be able to talk your Martian friend into helping us out… One, he can mind link all of us, including you and two, he’s a Superhero. I never like putting Joey in situations that could turn ugly. I did it once and I regret it.”

“You think it could turn ugly?”

“It did with Hadal.”

“True, but that was because Hadal had kryptonite.”

“Which reminds me, we better speak to your old pal Luthor. Make sure he’s not planning to deal that shit to anyone else.”

The mention of the name caused Clark’s hands to grow clammy. “What? Why?”

“When we tell Napier about kryptonite, and that it can control you, what do you think Napier, a rich and highly influential man will do with that information? Do you think he’d humbly allow Hadal to keep this powerful alien as his thrall, or do you think he'd try and convince the man of steel's long time rival to give him some kryptonite just like Hadal had done to see if he can take this thrall for himself?”

Clark frowned. “You really think he’d do that?”

“I think he’d try to and Luthor might end up spilling the beans that that's not what kryptonite does in the process. The point is we need to speak to him before we send Napier anything, just in case.”

“And you think he’d talk to me?” Clark asked. “Slade, the man has wanted me dead for *years* . He's not going to deny someone the opportunity of doing it for him.” He remembers what Hadal had told him in the lab. He was going to *pay* Hadal for his dead body.

“Yeah, but you’ll have me standing next to you when you’re talking, and if my reputation precedes me, he’ll know that while you might still have problems with the idea of killing, I do not and if you had to put your money on me or Luthor, who are you gonna pick?”

Clark pursed his lips. “Alright, fine.” He looked away, rubbing his hands against his pants. The conversation had made them grow even clammier.

Slade clapped his hands together. “Look at that. We have a plan, and your babies don’t have to be a part of it. We’ll talk to Luthor, then me and the boys will write and send off the letter and then once Bruce gives birth we can get things rolling. Damian and Terry will be home in no time.”

“When is your due date again, hon?” Clark asked.

Bruce chirped. ‘N E X T M O N T H.’

Clark watched his hands and tried to keep his face even. Just one month until fatherhood. “Great,” he said.

“Don't worry, Clark. You have plenty of time to get ready for them. December is just when they’ll be born.”

“Right.” Clark said, trying to remember what Hadal had told him. “They’ll be eggs when they come out. Five months after that is when they hatch.”

“Exactly.” Slade said, offering another pat on the back. “So you got time.”

Bruce nodded and reached out for Clark’s hand. Despite the fact that he was now rubbing blood and chocolate into Clark's skin, the gesture was still sweet and Clark found himself smiling at it.

With that, Slade left, voicing that he would be back tomorrow for Clark and that they’d go and speak to Luthor then. Even though the mere idea of it caused Clark’s stomach to roll, he told himself it would be fine. He and Luthor were different men now. Maybe he didn’t want Clark as dead as he used to. Hell, maybe he even had hair now.

Chapter End Notes

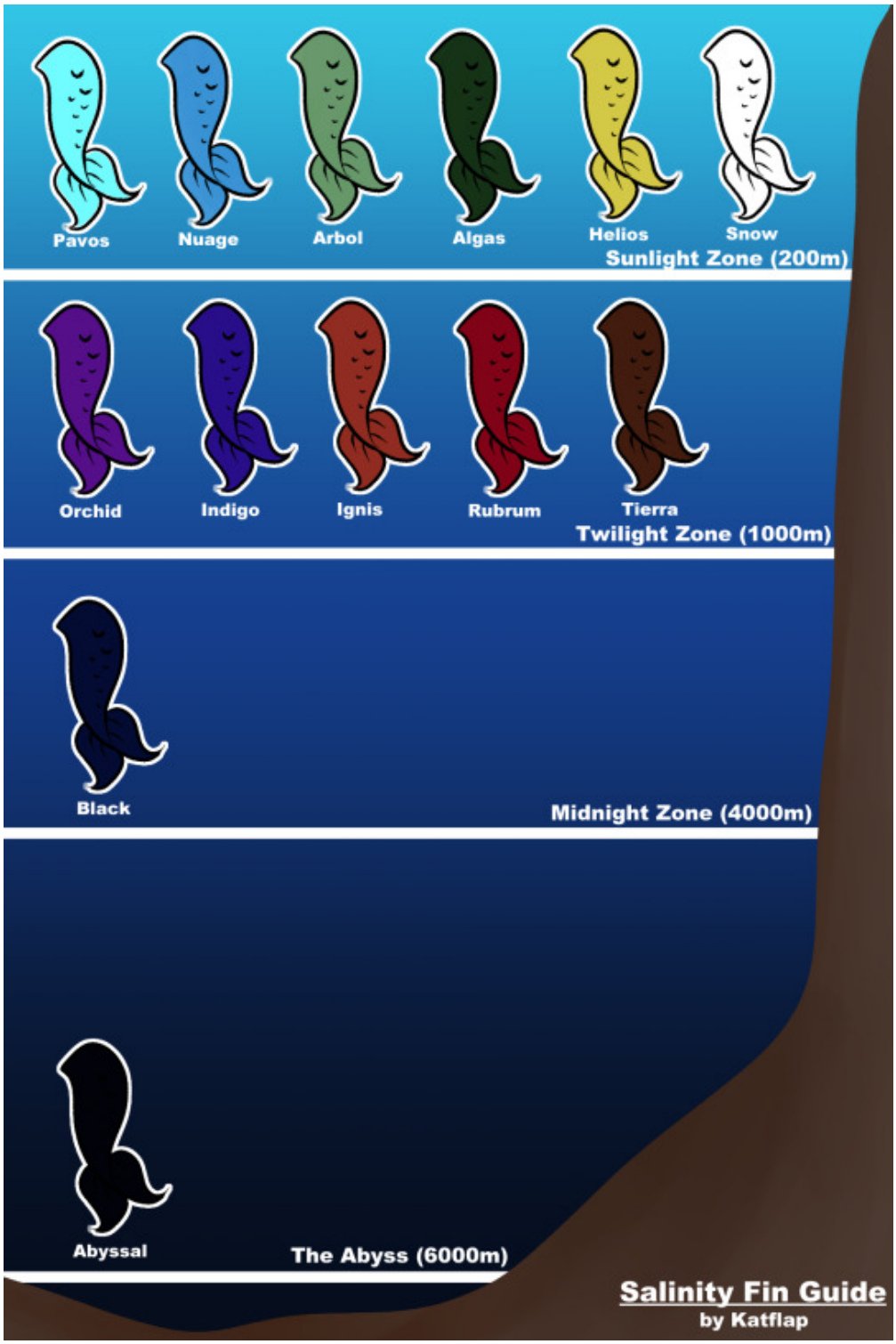
I'm sorry for the hiatus, gang 😭

Between uni and work I just didn't have any motivation to write. Then winter break happened and I came down with the worst cold ever, and only now do I have the time and energy to write 🙃

I know its a short update, but at least it's something. As always let me know your thoughts, it makes me happy to know how much you like this fic ❤️

Anyway, take care all and I will catch you all next time. Also remember to follow me on Tumblr Batman-Katflap as I tend to post stuff on there as to how my writing is going. Usually it's just me saying I haven't got the energy to write, but still it's something 😂

Also for those curious I made a guide to all the diffirent mer species in the fic. I might add to it, but for now these are the main ones :)


Pavos
Nuage
Arbol
Algas
Helios
Snow
Sunlight Zone (200m)
Orchid
Indigo
Ignis
Rubrum
Tierra
Twilight Zone (1000m)
Black
Midnight Zone (4000m)
Abyssal
The Abyss (6000m)
Salinity Fin Guide
by Katflap

Chapter 45

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

November 10th 2016

Clark was certain he was going to throw up.

It wasn't from the rocking of the boat, or the churning of the waves, it was from one thing and one thing alone.

Somehow in all his years alone it never dawned on him what happened to Metropolis after the quake. In his mind, the city was gone. Reclaimed by the ocean; its buildings now littering its floor with concrete and debris. That wasn't the case, though. No, Metropolis was still there. It remained.

It just had a new name.

New Metropolis. If he were able to, he's sure he would have made fun of it. He thought of all the other cities that slapped new in front of another cities name and called it a day. As it stood, the 'new' only served to make him light headed. It was 'New' Metropolis because the old one was indeed gone. It was 'New' because the old city laid the foundations. It was 'New' because to Clark it might as well have been a different city.

It wasn't though. That was the horrible part. As he stepped off the boat and stared up at the towering skyscrapers a creeping sense of deja vu washed over him. He had been here before, but there was something just slightly off about it all. A different shade of paint on a building. A different stone slab underneath his feet. It resembled what he knew, and yet, was nowhere close.

Perhaps sensing Clark's mind was elsewhere, Slade had paused just ahead of him. They were making their way down one of the many busy highstreets. Clark struggled to remember how they had gotten here from the marina, but it must have happened somehow. "You gonna be alright?" He asked.

Clark didn’t respond. Certain if he did he would actually throw up. He instead nodded, forcing himself to keep moving, even if each step felt like a mile.

He kept his stare down. If he did that, he found it easier to pretend he was anywhere else. Even the people and all the hustle and bustle could have been another city. It was the buildings that kept catching him. If he caught a reflection in a nearby window and saw those towers made of glass and steel he’d have to take a deep breath. He'd tell himself what he was seeing were not the buildings he used to fly by every day all those years ago. They were instead copies. Imitations. Just like the whole city.

“You wanna take a breather?” Slade asked after Clark paused for what had to be the tenth time in as many minutes. “Grab a coffee maybe?”

Whilst the idea was tempting, Clark shook his head. “I just want to see Luthor and get out of here.”

“Yeah, you say that but if you’re getting like this just walking around here, I don’t wanna know what you’re gonna do when you see Luthor.”

Clark didn’t know what he was going to do either. Every time he thought about the meeting, his mind would pause the moment Luthor appeared, as though even his imagination had no idea what the encounter could possibly entail.

Eventually they found their way to the city centre. Clark had expected it to look much like it had years ago, if slightly different, but that was not the case.

Where there was once a large central park lined with shops and offices, was now a field. Within the field were marble plinths, lined in concentric circles. In the centre of these walls was a large statue of two figures that nearly reached the heights of the nearby offices. One of the figures he knew to be Luthor; his bald head shining even brighter thanks to the bronze. He stood proud, with one hand holding up what appeared to be a small city. The other figure was flying above Luthor, one hand stretched up into the sky. He wore no cape, instead opting for what looked like a leather jacket.

“Kon?” Clark asked in disbelief.

“What was that now?” Slade asked, distracted by one of the street signs nearby.

“That statue. It's of Luthor and Kon.” He turned to face Slade. “But, why?”

Slade shrugged. “Let's go read the plaque and find out.”

They made their way through the sea of marble plinths. As they did, Clark realized with a shudder that they were covered in names. He had a suspicion he knew what this was, and as he passed plinths bearing the last name starting with K, he averted his gaze.

When they got to the centre, they made their way towards the large plaque under the statue. There were others milling around, some bowing their heads in silence, others taking pictures. Clark tucked in beside Slade as he read the words on the plaque, “In memory of those lost on August 17th 2012. New Metropolis carries you in its heart.”

Clark turned around to look at all the names surrounding him and swallowed thickly.

Slade walked around the base of the statue and Clark followed after. On the other side they found another plaque, this one was smaller and this time Slade didn’t read it aloud, allowing Clark to do it instead.

“In honour of Lex Luthor and Superboy. Saviours of New Metropolis.” Clark whispered. His eyes darted across the words repeatedly, willing them to make sense in his mind, yet they never seemed to.

Slade pulled up alongside him. “Didn’t realize your boy and Luthor were so close.”

Clark frowned at the words in front of him. Something about seeing ‘Superboy’ etched into the bronze before him left him feeling ill and he turned around. “I just don’t get it. After everything Luthor has done… why would Kon?” But he didn’t finish the question, leaving it out in the open instead.

“Four years is a long time. Who knows what’s happened between them.” Slade shoved his hands into his pockets. “Besides, maybe this is a good thing. Should make getting Luthor to not deal out any more kryptonite easier, at least.”

Clark tried to appreciate Slade's attempt at comforting him but in the moment he doubted anything was capable of rousing him from the dour mood he now found himself in. He instead remained quiet as they left the centre and made their way to the tallest and most ostentatious of the skyscrapers nearby.

As they walked into the lobby, the familiar aura that was LexCorp hit him. Something about the place always made his hair stand on end, and yet, no matter how many times he walked inside he could never place why.

Slade confidently walked up to the receptionist and patted his hand against the counter. “We have a meeting with Mr. Luthor. Twelve o’clock.”

The receptionist glanced up and took in the sight of both of them. Whilst Slade at least looked like he might be one to have meetings with Luthor, Clark was still wearing his old threadbare shirt and khaki shorts. She raised an eyebrow at them both. “Your names are?”

“Donavon Atlas and Adam Montague.”

The receptionist looked unconvinced before she turned to her computer and quickly nodded. “Yes, Mr. Luthor is expecting you both. Head on up. Code for the elevator is 435. It’s the top floor.”

“Thank you.” Slade said before quickly walking away.

Clark followed after. “Donavon Atlas?”

“Grant hacked Luthor’s calendar. Those are the names of the two investors Luthor is meeting with today.” Slade typed in the elevator code and stepped inside. Once they were both in, he pressed the highest floor available and the doors promptly slid shut.

“What happens when they both show up and find out someone pretending to be them is already up here?”

“They won’t. Whilst Grant was in the system, he emailed them both to say the appointment was cancelled.”

Clark let out a quiet hum.

“Don’t worry, Clark. This isn’t my first time doing this.”

The rest of the way up was spent in silence. When the quiet chime of the elevator sounded and the doors slid open, Clark took a deep breath as he followed Slade out into the corridor. Despite his assurances, Clark was expecting security to meet them at any movement.

They approached the desk in front of the office doors. The receptionist there smiled as they approached. “Mr. Atlas, Mr. Montague. I trust your journey here was pleasant.”

“Can't complain." Slade said readily. "If you could tell Mr. Luthor we’ve arrived.”

“I already have, please make your way through.”

After a few more courteous smiles, Slade and Clark made their way past him and through the double doors.

Once inside the office, Clark scanned for and quickly found Luthor. He was typing away at his computer and didn’t seem to notice they were there. Clark then took in the rest of the room. It was nearly identical to the last time he'd seen it. Right down to the almost showroom quality of it. There was no personality here, just the right amount of furniture to appear like a cosy office without having any of the other attributes required to make it feel actually lived in. The only new addition Clark could spy was a single photo frame on his desk and even then, Clark wouldn’t be surprised to find it still contained the stock photo it was sold with.

After he finished typing, Luthor looked up at them both. He didn't appear surprised. "Mr. Wilson. A pleasure."

Slade just smiled. "You were expecting me?"

"Your hacker isn't as good as you like to believe they are." Luthor said as he sat back in his chair. "But I figured you must have a good reason for wanting to speak with me, and I must admit, I was interested in meeting the infamous 'Deathstroke' for myself."

"You heard a lot about me?"

"I know enough that ignoring you only makes life more... difficult."

"That's one way of putting it." Slade said. He then cocked his head towards Clark. "And do you recognize my friend here?"

Luthor tilted his head to the side, his silver eyes piercing Clark to his very core. "Vaguely," he said with a mild shrug.

"It's the beard, right? It threw me off, too." Slade said as he stepped towards the desk. "You also probably never saw him much out of the red and blue."

At that, Luthor's eyes narrowed in thought before blowing wide, though that burst of emotion remained only for a moment before being squashed back down into cool indifference. "I see." Was all he said to that.

Slade sat down on one of the chair before Luthor's desk and gestured for Clark to do the same, though Clark quickly realized he couldn't actually move his legs. He instead remained where he was, rooted to the spot by the door.

“Listen Luthor, I'm not here to kill you." Slade said as he leant back in his chair, letting out a sigh. "If I was, you’d already be dead. I also think you knew that already otherwise you wouldn’t have allowed this meeting to happen in the first place. I just want to talk about some things, if that’s alright.”

Luthor remained still though he eventually offered a small nod.

“Perfect.” Slade said, clearing his throat. “Now, I have it on good authority that you gave kryptonite to someone recently. Can you tell me who that person was?”

Luthor's eyes flicked to Clark's. “I believe it was a man named Hadal. He seemed to be under the impression that he’d found Superman living with a mer and wanted to get him out of the way as the mer I am told was quite valuable. I told him he was insane but he offered me quite a lot of money for a few grams of kryptonite. So I obliged.”

“You didn’t believe he actually found Superman?” Slade asked.

“No." Luthor said easily, and Clark could feel by the steady thump of his heart he was being honest. “I personally had thought you had gone off world after Metropolis fell. So when this man who all my associates had informed me was practically insane came to my office and told me Superman was still on earth and what's more was in a relationship with a mer, I decided to humour him. I gave him the kryptonite and told him about the lamps.”

“So you were okay with the idea that he could have actually killed Superman?”

“I didn't think he was going to *kill* anyone. I assumed he was going to make an ass out of himself.” Luthor said with a wave of the hand. “And if he did end up killing you, well…” Luthor shrugged. “It wasn’t going to affect me either way.”

Clark finally managed to move his feet. He didn’t realize how quiet the room had grown as he walked up to the desk. He eyed Luthor and despite his steely gaze his heart rate had increased ever so slightly. “You were going to pay him for my corpse.” Clark said evenly.

Slade’s eye flicked between the two, taking in Clark’s eerily blank expression and Luthor’s own attempt at one. Eventually the man let out a breath. “I told him that if he did indeed manage to kill

you, I'd pay for your body. I wanted to use it for research. I'm sure you can understand. It was nothing personal."

"You've wanted me dead for years."

"I wanted you *dead* when you were a nuisance." Luthor stated. "Once you disappeared, I had no need to kill you, but if you died I wasn't going to turn down the opportunity to study your body."

Clark held his stare for a moment longer but eventually closed his eyes. Taking a deep breath. He turned to Slade. "He's telling the truth."

"Of course he is, the man is famously pragmatic." Slade folded his arms. "The question now becomes how do we stop you from dealing kryptonite to anyone else who might ask for some?"

"Why would anyone else ask me?"

"Have you ever heard of the mer auctioneer 'Jack Napier'?"

"I have."

Slade's expression darkened. "Have you ever been invited to one of his auctions?"

"Not his specifically." Luthor said, clasping his hands together. "I've been invited to many auctions over the years, but I've never gone to one. I personally find the idea of keeping mers as pets barbaric."

"You do?" Slade asked, genuine surprise creeping into his voice.

"Even if you don't believe they have humanity, you must admit they have some semblance of it."

Luthor said. “Besides, a cat is just as good of a pet and it doesn’t require several metric tons of salt water to survive.”

“Right.” Slade nodded. “Well, the thing is that I need to get a hold of Napier.”

“As I already said, I've never been invited to his auctions.”

“I appreciate that. What I am saying is that Napier is very hard to get a hold of. As you can imagine he does not want to ever meet me and does everything in his power to prevent it.”

“Rightly so.”

“I have a plan on how I'm going to get to him, but it involves our mutual friend here.” He gestured to Clark. “And for it to work I need to make sure that no more kryptonite makes its way out into the world.”

“You must be very eager to add his body to your growing pile.”

Slade’s lip curled upwards. “And you can probably imagine how big the pile is already.”

Luthor nodded once. “Yes. I certainly wouldn’t want to be part of it. So, tell me how to avoid such a fate?”

“Don’t deal kryptonite to anyone else. No matter how much money they offer you. If you do, I will come for you and I'll make sure your death is neither quick nor painless.”

“Done.” Luthor said easily. Even offering his hand out to Slade who took it and shook it readily. He then turned his attention to Clark. “I trust we can put this whole fiasco behind us. I would hate for you to start bothering me again.” He offered out his hand to Clark, and Clark found himself staring at it. That was until his focus shifted to the lone photo frame on his desk. He was surprised it did indeed have a photo in it, one that didn’t look like it was straight off the shelf. The more he stared at it however, the more he recognised what the photo was of.

“Is that...” Clark began, brushing Luthor's hand aside as he leant forward and picked up the photo frame. Now that he could get a better look at it, his suspicions were confirmed. It was a photo of Kon, grinning in a pair of mickey mouse ears. Luthor stood beside him, wearing a pair of his own, though he looked far less enthused than Kon about the situation. “What the Hell is this?” Clark muttered.

“Connor wanted to go to Disneyland for his birthday.” Luthor shrugged. “I told him he was too old to go but he said that he’s technically only ten and I couldn't exactly argue with that logic.”

Clark, still grappling with what he was seeing and now hearing, shook his head. “But… why? What--” Clark felt his legs give out. He practically fell into the plush chair behind him. “I don't understand...”

“It’s quite simple really, once you went AWOL, Connor lacked a paternal figure in his life. He didn’t *want* to talk to me at first, I can assure you. When I was in the process of rebuilding Metropolis, he used to hover outside my office, scrawling graffiti or otherwise being a nuisance. Then one day, he came inside and we spoke at length about everything. I told him that even though he is a clone of you, I view him as my son and it was my hope that one day he’d see me as his father. After that, he joined me in my mission of rebuilding Metropolis and became its new protector. And then not long after that he called me 'dad' for the first time." Luthor's lip flickered upward before it was forced back down. If Clark didn't know better he'd have thought there was genuine warmth behind that aborted smile.

Despite what he was hearing Clark simply could not believe it and thus refused to. “That can’t be true. He *hates* you. I know he does.”

“He *did* hate me. Over four years ago. He used to be as much of a thorn in my side as you were.” Luthor shrugged. “But people change.”

“Kon wouldn’t have. You must have done something to him.”

“If that makes you feel better you’re more than welcome to believe it. But I can assure I did nothing more than be there for him. To be a father he can rely on.”

“Don’t call yourself his father.” Clark ground out.

“You don’t call yourself that, so why can't I?” Luthor tilted his head. “Even before you left you never saw Connor as anything more than a clone of yourself.”

“Don't make me sound like I’m the asshole here. He *is* a clone of me. A clone *you* made to try and kill me and you expect me to believe that he now sees *you* as his father.”

“I don’t expect you to believe anything.” Luthor said easily. “I don't care the slightest bit about your opinion. You are no longer relevant to me. You ceased to be the moment you left Metropolis. Connor is now my primary concern, not because he is your clone or because I want to use him but because is my *son* , and I won’t have you try to take him from me after you weren’t even there for him.”

Clark felt his eye twitch. “Was that a threat, Luthor?”

“It was.” Luthor said, his eyes narrowing.

Clark’s jaw clenched shut and Slade sat forward, his hands up. “Look I think things are getting a little heated here, we should probably--”

“I don't believe it.”

“Yes, yes. You’ve already said.” Luthor muttered, his boredom apparent. “I don’t suppose you could be in disbelief elsewhere. I have work to do.”

“Right.” Slade said, quickly getting up from his seat. He grabbed Clark by the arm and practically forced him up given how much of a deadweight Clark was in that moment. He also had to wrangle the photo frame from Clark’s grip and place it back down. “We’ll get out of your hair.”

Luthor stared at him.

Slade cleared his throat, looking away. “Uh, never mind. Let's get going, Clark.”

After some shoving on Slade's end, the pair left the room. Once they were in the elevator again, Clark looked down at the hand that had been holding the frame as though it were still there. "Did I imagine that?" He asked himself. "Luthor didn't have a photo of Kon and him at Disneyland, right?"

Slade pursed his lips. "No, he did." He leant against the wall of the elevator as they slowly made their way back down.

"It must be photoshop." Clark continued, ignoring Slade entirely.

"Yeah, I'm sure Luthor just photoshopped a photo of him and Kon on the off chance you swung by."

"Exactly. Why else would he put it there? He *knew* I'd see it."

"Oh no, hon. I was being sarcastic."

Clark continued to ignore him. "I need to tell Kon. I bet he has no idea that Luthor has that photo."

"Considering he was in it, I doubt that."

The elevator door slid open and Clark quickly walked out. Slade followed after him. "Listen not that I don't enjoy seeing you make an ass out of yourself, but could you maybe hold off on jumping down the boys throat? Maybe wait until you look a little less like you're gonna break something."

"What? I'm not gonna 'jump down' on him. He needs to know Luthor--"

Despite the people around them, Slade grabbed Clark by the arm and pulled him to a stop. "I know you like to live in denial, but there is burying your head in the sand and then there is whatever the fuck you're doing right now."

Clark tried to shake his head and offer an easy smile but what came out was neither easy nor a smile. “Look, you don’t know Kon, this isn’t--”

“I don't think you know him anymore, either." Slade said as he let go and shook his head. “I mean it. Kon seems like a good kid but it's been four years since you’ve last spent any real time with him. You don't know what he's been through in that time. If you come down on him too hard about all this, you might just wreck whatever you have left with the kid.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” Clark muttered, turning away from him.

“I just don’t think you wanna admit that Luthor did something good.”

“Because it’s not possible!” Clark ground out, whirling back around. “He has an ulterior motive for this. I don’t know what it is, but he doesn’t see Kon as his son.”

“Do you?”

Clark faltered. “What?”

“That's what Luthor said.” Slade said. “He said you didn’t see him as a son, even before you left. So are you telling me even after all this time you still just refer to him as your clone?”

Clark felt a familiar wriggling in his stomach. “What else am I meant to call him?”

Slade rolled his eyes. “I dunno. Your *son* .”

“But he’s *not* my son.” Clark said, his jaw clenching.

Slade shook his head, and despite not saying anything from his expression alone, Clark felt

disappointment radiate off of him. “God, no wonder you’ve not bonded with any of Bruce’s other kids.”

“What?”

Slade finally walked out of the foyer of the building and Clark had no choice but to follow after him.

Once they were outside and away from the prying eyes of Luthor’s employees, Slade pulled out a cigarette. “You know I call Bruce’s boys *my* kids too and they see me as their dad. Grant and Joey aren't related by blood to Selina and Bruce, but they still call them their aunt and uncle." Slade lit the cigarette and took a drag. “That’s just how it is with mer pods, even if you’re not related by blood, you’re pod. You’re *family* .”

“I’m not saying Kon isn’t my family.”

“Right.” Slade said with a bob of the head. “But don’t you think you're distancing him from you because of your hang up over a word?”

Clark looked away.

“That’s it, isn’t it? It’s the word.”

Clark remained silent.

“Look I won’t push you on this, that’s a job for a professional, but you really should talk to Kon.”

“I will.” Clark said, feeling his eyes burn. He closed them, trying to block out the suddenly too loud sounds of the city around them. “Can we go now?”

“Yeah, sure.” Slade took one last breath of his cigarette and threw it to the ground. “Also, whilst I

remember, I want you and Bruce to come by Cottonwood tomorrow. Joey and I will be finishing off the letter and we might need to send photos of Bruce along with it."

"Why?"

"For proof that he actually exists." Slade said as he shoved his hands into his pockets and headed back towards the marina. "And you know that Hadal wouldn't miss the opportunity to brag about finally having an abyssal fin. After *years* of him being denied Napier's."

A quiet hum was all Clark said to that. He'd heard Slade, understood what he'd said, but his mind was wandering elsewhere. It had gone back to that photo, to the smile Kon was wearing. To those stupid ears. Slade was right, he needed to talk to Kon. He just couldn't help but worry about what he was going to hear when he did.

Chapter End Notes

Another update? Within a month of the last? Whoa! :O

Also Luthor was a treat to write. I really enjoyed giving him bitter ex wife vibes, and we shall just have to see what Kon has to say about the whole situation. (°ʖ°)

As always lemme know your thoughts. All of y'all's love for this fic is what keeps me going :')

Take care! And I'll see you all next time :D

Chapter 46

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

Warnings for mentions of incest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

November 11st 2016

When he got to Selina's home, he was thankful it was quiet.

The last time he had been here, the whole place had been a hive of activity. When he had been told that the black fins would be staying at Selina's for the time being, Clark had assumed they would have stayed within the confines of the pool room, leaving the rest of the place free from roaming mers. He had assumed wrong however, as the mers were not in fact deterred by the lack of water outside of the pool and ventured out into the rest of the home frequently, choosing to slide along the marble flooring with the same ease they might swim through water.

Because of this, Clark had found himself having to frequently watch his step lest he tread on an errant fin as they shot past.

It didn't help that on that day the chaos of it all had been compounded by Diana's presence. Between Selina hanging off Diana, the young mers darting between the pool room and other areas of the house, he was quickly overwhelmed by it all and found himself counting down the minutes until he could leave.

Luckily today Diana was not there meaning that Selina was not hovering nearby, and knowing more of what to expect from the black fins, meant that Clark wasn't as taken aback as he stepped inside holding Bruce and felt Steph and Cass brush past his feet as they slid across the floor, nor did he falter when he found Duke sitting on the floor of the kitchen surrounded by open jars and a loaf of bread.

"Oh, hey Clark." Duke said conversationally. "Are you here to see Slade?"

There was a time in his life that the image of a mer casually eating PB&J sandwiches on the floor of his partner's ex lover's kitchen might have felt like the result of drugs and a fever dream, but here he was, living it. “Yeah, is he here yet?” he asked, setting Bruce down on the tiles.

“I think he’s checking out the building work next door. Shouldn’t be too long, though.” Duke took a bite of what he was eating, a sandwich, and gestured to the array of jars around him. “Are you hungry? I could make you one if you wanted.” Clark didn’t know much about mer species or what certain colors meant, but he knew Duke was a mix like Yana. Along with the deep blue of his scales were splashes of bright yellow, so vivid they seemed to shine.

At the question, Clark shook his head. Bruce however, slid up to Duke and raised the jar of peanut butter to his face, sniffing it, his expression far more serious than what was needed for sniffing peanut butter. “I didn’t know that mers ate sandwiches. Kinda figured bread is in short supply at the bottom of the ocean.” Clark said, only mildly surprised by what he was seeing. Bruce’s pregnancy cravings had really done wonders for desensitizing him to the plethora of foods a mer could eat.

Duke shrugged. “Depends. I was raised on land mostly. Ate a pretty standard human diet compared to most half fins.”

Clark hummed, fighting a smile as Bruce stuck his finger into the peanut butter and tasted it. Letting out a sharp trill as he tried it again, Duke slid the jar of jelly towards him and nodded. Giving a quiet trill of his own. “Most pure mers can’t stomach human foods too well.” Duke said as he took another bite. Bruce opened the jelly and dipped a finger inside, tasting that as well.

Clark titled his head, a fond smile touching his lips as he watched. “Bruce seems fine eating it.” He said.

“I said ‘most’.” Duke replied. “Abyssal fins are sort of the exception.” He shuddered, the yellow tips of his fins shaking as he did. “Their stomachs are something else...”

“Is that so?” Clark asked, before the image of chocolate covered dolphin meat filled his mind and he grimaced. He shook his head. “I guess Bruce *has* been known to eat some questionable foods...”

Duke hummed in agreement. “Yeah, he can do that because his stomach acid dissolves pretty much anything it comes into contact with. Hell, I’m pretty sure an abyssal fin could eat *metal* if they wanted

to.” Just then, his ears twitched and his eyes went to the doorway behind Clark. “Slade’s back, by the way.”

Sure enough, when Clark turned, he saw Slade striding towards him, bobbing his head in acknowledgement. “How are you doing?”

“Same old.” Clark shrugged. “So what’s the game plan for today?”

“Let’s head out to my boat. Joey and Grant are already there.” Slade said before he turned a wry smile Bruce's way. “You wanna bring the jar with you, Bruce?”

Clark turned back to Bruce and in the mere moments he had looked away the mer's face was now covered almost entirely in jelly. Despite this, he managed a dignified nod as he trilled and tried to shimmy his way across the floor, though being pregnant *and* holding a jar meant he didn't little more than rock from side to side.

Clark took the hint and lifted him up, trying his best to not get jelly on his shirt (he failed). “Good talking to you Duke.” Clark nodded.

“Yeah, come say hi to the others when you're done.”

“Will do.”

With that, the three made their way back to Slade's boat. It was much the same as the last time Clark had seen it, though this time Clark actually went down into the compartment Joey had been tucked away inside last time. It was cramped, but given that it seemed to be for storage that wasn’t exactly surprising. It did however have a table as well as several chairs for them to set themselves down on.

He set Bruce down first before taking the seat beside him. Grant and Joey were already down here, with the latter furiously typing away at the keyboard of his laptop as though he were punishing it. Whilst he waited for Slade to settle, he turned his attention to Bruce who was still lapping at the jar with wanton abandon. Clark pursed his lips at the sight. Between the sounds and the look on Bruce’s face as he ate, Clark could feel his palms grow warm. He knew he should look away, but Bruce’s tongue darting out and swiping at the jelly was just too hard to resist.

Then, something came into his vision. He sat back and realized it was Grant. He was clicking his fingers in front of his face. “Quit eye-fucking my uncle and pay attention.”

“But I wasn’t--” Clark sputtered.

“Yeah yeah, sure you weren’t.” Grant said with a roll of the eyes. “Now, can we get down to business or you wanna wait until he’s finished with the jar?”

Clark kept his mouth shut ignoring the grin on Slade's face as he cleared his throat and turned his full attention to Grant.

With a satisfied nod, Grant continued. “We’ve finished the letter.” He said, leaning over the table to where Joey sat and taking the sheet of paper from on top of the stack of files there. “I think we did a good job, if I do say so myself.”

“Can I read it?”

“Go ahead.” Grant said, sliding it across the table.

Dear, Jack.

Where do I even begin? This month has been a tour de force of activity and I worry that my letter will hardly do it justice.

To begin, I found one, Jack. An actual abyssal fin. What’s more, he is the same one I had tried to acquire previously.

After the debacle with the mer hunters, I figured he was a lost cause, but no, I finally managed to acquire him. How you might ask? His owner bought him to me, yes, he actually bought him to me. But that isn’t even the best part. You see, when I tried to dispose of him in my usual manner, it didn’t work. Why? Because the needle broke on his skin. It broke , Jack. Snapped in two. It was as if his skin were made of steel.

That's because it was. It was Superman. The man of steel himself brought a mer to me. I saw an opportunity and I know you would be proud of what I did. I can’t share all the details with you, (not that I don’t trust you Jack, but given your penchant for the rare and exotic I wouldn’t put it past you to

try and take him from me). All you need to know is he is highly docile now, and obeys my every command.

His mer on the other hand is very much a handful. Even with the morphine, he is beyond troublesome. How you have managed to keep your abyssal fins under control for all of these years is beyond me. They're far more unruly than black fins. That much I can say for certain.

But yes! I have acquired one of my own, and what's more, I have been able to confirm my theories. He is capable of bearing children and I believe what I am about to propose will interest you greatly.

I believe our mers should mate. Whilst I would be interested in seeing him mate with Nightingale or Robin, I'm sure any of your other mers would offer such beautiful cross breeds. Any you wished to keep, you could and any that you didn't, you could auction off. Of course I would like to keep at least one mer per litter for my own research, but given the genes these mers would have, I'd be happy with any you did not want.

Which is why Jack, once more I am asking you, no, pleading with you. Yes or no, may I see your mers?

Whatever you wish for, I will try to grant. So please, say yes.

Regards, Elijah.

Once he was finished, Clark set the letter down.

Grant cocked his head. "Well, what do you think?"

Clark pursed his lips. "I take it you enjoyed making me sound like an idiot."

" *I* didn't. Hadal did. Remember we're in character, Clark." Grant said. "Though you have to admit you were an idiot trusting Hadal."

Clark rolled his eyes but otherwise dropped the conversation, going back to the letter he made a face. “You also didn’t mention Kryptonite.”

“No, I thought we should keep that to ourselves for now.” Slade said as he tented his hands. “Despite the monthly letters, Hadal doesn’t exactly trust Napier to not gut him at the first opportunity. Plus if you had an all powerful thrall, I doubt you’d be eager to tell someone how you managed to do it.”

“Right…” Clark said more to himself. Wordlessly sliding the letter over to Bruce once he noticed him craning his neck to try and read it. “So you’re going to fax it today?”

“After we take a photo of Bruce.” Slade got up and went over to a small box. He reached in and lifted out something that Clark was sadly familiar with. Upon seeing it, Bruce hissed.

“You won’t be wearing it for long.” Slade said softly, setting the iron lung down on the table. “You know Hadal would have put you in one of them, Bruce.”

After more hissing and consoling, they left the meeting room, opting to use one of the bedrooms to conduct their photoshoot. It was the same one Clark and Bruce had stayed in last time. The tub of water was still in there as well as the small cot, but the rest of the room was largely bare. “Clark, set Bruce down in the corner.”

Clark did as he was told, setting Bruce down in the corner. The walls here were white and nondescript. It reminded Clark of the clinical feel of Hadal’s lab and he assumed that’s why Slade had chosen this spot.

After Slade had wiped all remnants of jelly from Bruce’s face and locked the lung loosely into place, Joey stepped forward holding a camera.

“Face away from us, Bruce.” Slade said.

Bruce didn’t need to be told twice, he turned around so that his back was all that was on show. The glint of the iron lung visible beneath the edges of his hair. The position also had the added bonus of hiding Bruce’s burgeoning stomach from the camera.

Joey got in close, the shutter of the camera sounding a few times. When it stopped, he stood and showed the camera to Slade who nodded. “We got it.” He then bent down and quickly undid the lung, letting it fall to the floor in a heap. “See? That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Bruce simply grumbled and slid out of the room. Clark’s stare followed him and once he was out of view, he felt Slade’s hand on his back. “You should go after him. We’ll send off the letter.”

“When do you think Napier will reply?”

Slade shrugged. “Could be an hour, could be a day, could be a week. He’s not as consistent as Hadal.”

“Alright, let me know when he does.”

Slade nodded. Clark left the room, and then the boat upon realizing Bruce was no longer inside. He was currently shimmying across the sand and Clark quickly caught up with him. “You okay, hon?”

Bruce didn’t reply, instead he tried to move faster, though the sand quickly put a stop to that. He slipped and fell against it with a grunt, stopping his movement entirely.

“Bruce!" Clark let out as he crouched down beside him and helped him sit up. He held his hand to Bruce's stomach and once he was sure he was fine he let out a breath and leant in close to Bruce. “Just stop for a second, okay? Look at me.”

But Bruce's stare was resolutely on the sand and Clark reached up for his chin and held it. “Bruce. Look at me.”

Those eyes slid to him and when they did, Clark spoke. “What are you thinking?”

Bruce took a deep breath and brought his hands up. ‘I ' M W O R R I E D.’

Clark’s expression grew soft as he rubbed his hand across Bruce’s flank. “Just say the word Bruce, and I'll run back in there and rip up the letter. We can think of something else. Something where you’re not involved.”

Bruce remained still, his eyes flicking to Clark as his lips pursed together.

The expression caught Clark, and he frowned at its quiet implication. “You’re worried about me?”

A small nod.

Clark opened his mouth to object, but as he did images of his blood soaked chest came back to him and he swallowed thickly. “What happened with Hadal was a fluke. He got the jump on me but that won’t happen this time. Not just because he won’t have Kryptonite, but because if he even *thinks* about doing something we don’t want, I will end him.”

Bruce lifted his head up and despite the lack of words, his eyes spoke volumes. He nodded, leaning forward to press his forehead against Clark’s. They remained there for a few moments before he pulled back and took a breath.

Clark let out a quiet hum. “Now then, as much as I love watching you scramble on sand, how about I carry you inside instead?”

Once they were back inside, Clark made his way to the pool room, making sure to watch his step as he did. Luckily there were no mers sliding too and fro on this occasion and Clark managed to get Bruce to the pool room doors with only marginal hassle (it was marginal due to the fact that needed to stop by the kitchen in order for Bruce to get the jar of peanut butter.)

Now in the pool room, replete with peanut butter, Bruce slid his way into the water with a happy trill, leaving Clark to send a wave to the mers lounging along the shore.

Though he quickly noticed there was someone else sitting with them.

“Kon?” He asked, his disbelief evident.

Upon hearing his name, he slowly turned towards Clark, his shoulders tense. “Oh, hey Clark.”

Clark made a face and walked towards him, minding his step as both Jaime and Tim were reclining along the artificial shore beside him. The pair watched as Clark approached, with the former smiling at him.

“Hey, Clark,” he said.

Despite wanting to ask the mer how he was since his visit home, he was far too consumed with Kon and what his presence here could even mean that he barely acknowledged the mers greeting. Still, he didn’t want to be rude so sent a brief smile down to Jaime before turning his attention back to Kon. “What are you doing here? Is Diana with you?”

He knew for a fact she wasn’t and yet the idea that Kon was here for something other than a League visit just didn’t seem plausible. He raised his shoulders in a way that could only be described as squirrelly. “No she isn’t. I just wanted to come check on the mers, that’s all.”

“Why?” He asked, and even Clark was taken aback by how blunt the question sounded, and a quick glance down at the mer pair watching them told him he was in fact being kind of a dick. As such, he added. “It’s just, I didn't realize you cared that much about them.”

“Well, sure I do.” Kon bristled. “What, are you the only Kryptonian who's allowed to hang out with mers?”

Clark wanted to say that he didn’t so much as ‘hang out’ with a mer as was ‘lumped with one that he unfortunately now loves unconditionally’, but he didn’t. He instead shrugged. “Sorry, you’re right. I guess I just didn’t expect to see you here. But considering you are, I was actually hoping to have a word with you.”

All at once Kon’s irate expression dropped. “Oh?” He let out weakly.

“Yeah, but it’s best we do it in private.” He said, sending a pointed look down at the pair of mers.

“Go ahead.” Tim said, sliding past the two of them and into the water, though not before sending a quick look to Kon that the boy returned. Jaime followed after, sending another smile towards Clark.

Despite now being technically alone, Clark still ushered Kon out of the room and outside. They found their way onto the beach, walking away from the hustle and bustle of construction until only the faint sound of it could be heard.

Kon didn't look any more at ease the further they walked, and Clark realized he didn't exactly feel comfortable right now either. He let out a sigh and turned to Kon. "I spoke to Luthor yesterday."

Kon's lip was wedged firmly between his lips and he offered a nod. "Yeah? How did it go?"

Despite asking the question, his tone did little to conceal the fact that he was asking it out of politeness rather than genuinely curiosity. Meaning, "You already knew I went to see him, didn't you?" Clark asked, his voice flat.

Kon's eyes blew wide. " *What* ? No. Why would you think that? I don't talk to Luthor, he's just--" but Kon quickly stopped. Perhaps when he saw that Clark's expression didn't shift or when he realized there just wasn't any point in lying anymore. "Okay, fine, he told me. Happy?"

"Why did he tell you?" Clark asked evenly.

Kon let out a pained sigh. "Clark, do we really have to do this? You *know* why he told me."

"He told me some things, but I didn't buy it."

Kon looked at him then, and the pain there was enough to cause Clark to falter. Maybe this wasn't a good idea.

'It's been four years since you've last spent any real time with him. You don't know what he's been through in that time. If you come down on him too hard about all this, you might just wreck whatever you have left with the kid.'

Despite how much he didn’t want to listen to the man's words, Clark couldn’t help but agree with Slade here as he shook his head with a sigh. “It’s just… I know it's been a long time since we’ve talked, but I guess I thought there were some things I wouldn't need to worry about happening in that time, and you getting adopted by Luthor was one of them.”

Kon took a deep breath as he folded his arms. “Yeah, well, if it’s any consolation I didn't exactly plan on it happening either.” Clark’s brow raised at that and as though hearing his accusation, Kon shook his head. “He didn’t brainwash me. He just…” Kon looked away. “Was there.”

Clark winced at that. “Kon…”

“I don't wanna talk about it right now.” Kon said, shaking his head sharply “You have a lot going on, the last thing you need is this.”

Clark however stepped towards him. “No. What do you want to tell me?”

“Clark, seriously, it’s fine, just--”

But Clark reached for his elbow, holding him there. “Kon. *Talk* to me.”

Kon stood there for a moment, his lips curled into a tight frown. Then, with more strength than Clark was expecting he pulled free from Clark’s grip. “Four years. *Four* years you've been gone.” He took a deep breath, steadying his voice. “I figured at first you'd only be gone for a couple of months. I thought you’d eventually realize you still had family, people who *cared* about you, and then you’d come home.”

Kon closed his eyes. “But that didn’t happen. A year went by, and then another. I knew Kara considered going with Diana to go check on you, but me?” Kon gave a mirthless laugh. “I did at first. I told myself I was just building up the courage to do it. But as the months went by, a thought came to me, and despite everything, I kept thinking about it.”

“It was when you first told me about Lois being pregnant, you said ‘i'm going to have a son.’” Kon closed his eyes. “At the time I didn't think anything of it, I just remember being happy for you. But when you were gone, when *everything* was gone, I kept hearing those words. I'm going to have a son. Not ‘another’ son. Not ‘*you’re* going to be a brother’. No. *I'm* having a son, my first and *only* son.”

“After I thought that, I just kept dwelling on our relationship. I tried to tell myself that you must have seen me as something more than your clone. Like, I know we used to joke about it. Like, yes I am your clone, but that I was still family at the end of the day, but then I realized if that was true, if you saw me as anything other than a science experiment gone wrong, you'd have come to see me, right?”

Clark’s mouth opened but Kon shook his head. “Don’t. I know what you're going to say, you’re going to say, ‘but Kon you *are* my family. I *do* care about you’ and whilst I used to think that was enough for me, Luthor showed me that it wasn’t. See, I realized that being a part of a family is one thing but being *something* in that family is another. You and Kara have that something, but me? What did I have? I knew what I wanted. I knew I wanted you to tell me that I was your son, but… that never happened.”

Kon let out a sigh and kicked his foot against the sand. “I know you hate Luthor, and I get it. Really, I do. He did some shady shit and tried to hurt you, but the thing is, that's all in the past. Fact is, since you've been gone, he’s done nothing but good things for the people of New Metropolis. But most importantly to me is that I'm *his* son, he's *my* dad. There is nothing conditional there. He doesn’t love me despite being a clone, he just loves me. And I'm going to be honest with you, Clark, if you have a problem with that, I really don't care. Because unlike you, he’s been *here*.”

Once he had finished speaking, he turned away from Clark, facing out towards the water. In the silence, Clark realized he didn't know what to say. When Kon was speaking, he could listen. He was good at listening. Listening didn't require him to speak and potentially ruin something. But now that there was silence there was the quiet request for a response, but that was the kicker, Clark didn't know what to say other than,

“I'm sorry.”

Those two words felt all the more inadequate given the deluge of words that came before them. He knew more was needed but he had to think of them lest one he would end up regretting came out instead. Kon however turned back around to face him, his cheeks damp with tears. Clark reached for him, but as though remembering how Kon shook him off, his hand remained in the limbo between them.

“God, you must think I'm a dick...” he whispered. “You've been through so much shit and here I am whining that you about… about what? That you didn’t love me like a son? You didn't owe me that.” Kon wiped his face and shook his head.

“Kon I…” Clark pressed his lips together. “I don't even know where to begin.”

“You don't have to say anything. I should have just kept quiet.”

“No,” Clark said firmly. “I needed to hear this.”

He really did. Despite those years of isolation, there was some small part of his mind that always went back to Kon and Kara. To the life he left behind. When everything else was gone, he knew his friends and remaining family were safe. Even without seeing him, their existence provided more comfort than he realized. He doubts his ever did the same for them. In fact, if he had to guess, he’d say it had the opposite effect.

He took a deep breath, trying to sort through his thoughts. If he waited four years, Clark liked to think had just a touch more patience to listen to him now. “I really don't know why I have this hang up. I know it's just a word, but it’s like, over the years that word has changed so much for me.”

“When I first found you, the word ‘son’ didn’t even enter the equation. The fact was, you weren’t my son. You were a clone. One that was made to try and *kill* me.”

Kon’s shoulders tensed as Clark approached. “It was Lois who got me to get my head out of my ass. She was the one who convinced me that Luthor didn’t have his claws in you as much as I liked to believe. That you weren’t going to kill me the minute my back was turned. That welcoming you into the family wasn’t going to backfire.”

“And it didn’t. You slot in like you belonged. You were a Kent through and through. Ma and Pa loved you, saw you as their own, just like they saw Kara. Just like they saw me. I remember asking them how they did it. How they could just see these orphaned aliens and treat them like they were their own flesh and blood. They told me it wasn’t something they could teach. That I had to wait for it to happen and when it did, I’d understand.”

“So I waited. I kept hoping that one day it would click. That I'd experience what Ma and Pa did. That I would finally see you as my son. My brother. My anything, but it just never happened. So ‘clone’ remained and I figured that was how it was going to remain.”

“Then Lois got pregnant. I realized I was going to have a son and this time, it wasn’t in my control. The minute that baby was here, that would be it. I would be a dad and that’s when I realized it wasn’t the word ‘son’ that repelled me. It was ‘dad’.”

“I just couldn’t see it. Me as a dad. Me as someone in charge of a whole other person. This baby would rely on me, would need me for everything and that responsibility terrified me. What if I was terrible at it? What if he hated me? What if Lois realized just how bad I was and wanted a divorce? The thoughts got so bad I started to see Dinah. I told her my worries and she eased me through it all. Lois, too. They helped me more than I can even express, and little by little, those worries lessened.”

Clark faced out towards the water, closing his eyes. “Then the quake happened and all at once all those worries stopped. Not because I overcame them, but because they simply ceased to exist. My home was gone. My wife was gone. My son was gone. I wasn’t going to be a dad and that was that.”

“But now I am going to be a dad. And after talking with Luthor yesterday, I now realize why I never called you my son. It had nothing to do with you. It was always me. I never saw myself as a dad but I am one, and I have been for a long time.” Clark reached for Kon, placing his hand gently against his back. “You are my son. You always have been. I’m just sorry it’s taken me so long to say it, Kon.”

For a moment, Kon didn’t respond, remaining as he was facing away towards the water. Then in less time than it took to blink, he was there in Clark’s arms, curling in close to him as a sob wracked through his chest.

Clark didn’t pay attention to how long they were there, focused as he was on keeping Kon upright as he lent against him. Eventually, Kon did pull back, though his face was far redder than it had been before as were his eyes. “Sorry. I didn’t realize how much I needed to hear that.”

Clark nodded and as if feeling that same burden fall from his shoulders he let out a breath. “I get that.”

Kon sighed, wiping his eyes. “I’m glad we talked.”

“Me too, Kon.”

“And listen, I know you still have your hang ups about Luthor, but I really would appreciate it if you

could try to get along with him. He really has changed."

Clark grimaced at the mention of the name but eventually let out a sigh. "For you, I will try."

Kon grinned. "Thanks."

They began to walk back to the house though Clark paused upon seeing Slade walk towards them. He was holding some paper, and whether it was from that or the expression on his face, Clark's blood ran cold.

"What up, Slade?" Kon asked, apparently oblivious to the aura around the men. At the silence however, he quickly clued on and furrowed his brows. "Everything good?"

"Run along, kid. I gotta talk to this one." Slade grunted as he gestured to Clark.

Kon went to leave, but Clark reached for him. "He can stay."

Clark got the feeling Slade wanted to argue, but he didn't push it and simply let out. "Napier replied."

"Oh?" Clark asked, though he didn't feel hopeful given the look on Slade's face.

"He said no."

"Oh." Clark said, the word coming out of him like a breath of air after a punch in the gut.

"That wasn't all he sent, though." Slade said briskly. "He also sent us a photo."

"A photo?"

Slade didn’t speak, holding out the piece of paper in his hand and despite it being offered to him, Clark didn’t want to reach for it. Something told him that whatever was on it was bad news. News he didn’t want to know.

Kon however had no such qualms and took the paper, looking at it closely. His face betrayed nothing aside from concern. “These mers… they look like Bruce and Tim.”

“That’s because they’re Bruce's sons.” Slade said evenly.

“All three of them?”

“ *Three* ?” Clark let out as he jolted and snatched the paper from Kon, staring at the image on it intently.

In it, he saw two adult mers. Even if Slade hadn't told him who they were, he’d have recognised Bruce’s blood anywhere. Damian was his spitting image, with the only difference being his warm skin and bright green eyes. His expression in the photo was volatile, with bared teeth and a body marred with so many cuts and scars it was hard to find a piece of skin without any. Positioned behind him was Terry, and though he was smaller than his brother, that wasn’t saying much as he was no less intimidating, with cold blue eyes and a scowl that spoke volumes.

And that’s when Clark saw it. There were indeed three mers in the photo. There was a baby in Terry’s arms. Unlike the pair, it wore no iron lung, but that wasn’t the only thing of note about its appearance. Their scales covered nearly all of their body, with only their mouth and patches on their arms being bare, revealing the warm skin underneath. Then there were the eyes. Clark starkly realized the baby had none, with the area they were meant to be barren aside from those dark scales.

“Slade, what am I looking at?” Clark asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Wordlessly, Slade held out the other piece of paper in his hands and despite not wanting to, Clark reached for it. He stared down at the words before him and barely noticed he had stopped breathing.

Dearest, Elijah.

No ❤️

As you can see, Robin and Nightingale have already provided me with a brilliant Starling.

Maybe when you find something better to offer, we can talk.

From your only friend, Napier.

At the words, Clark's mind went to one of Hadal's previous letters. *'It would also allow me to confirm several theories I have. I know I have bored you with them before, but I really do ask that you x-ray their stomachs in search of a primordial womb.'*

Did this mean...?

Clark swallowed thickly. “He’s not implying what I think he’s implying, right?” At the silence, Clark looked up. “Slade?”

One look at the man's face answered that question for him.

Kon looked between the two of them and then read the words on the letter himself. Once he finished he looked towards Slade. “So Napier is the one who has Bruce’s sons? Like how Hadal had Tim and the others?”

“Yes.” Slade said with a slow nod.

“Okay… So let's go get them.” Kon said as though it were that simple.

“We will get them.” Slade said firmly, taking the papers back from Clark. “We just have to change

tact. The boys are already writing up the next letter." He eyed Clark. "We're going back to the original plan. It's our only option now, and if that doesn't work…" Slade grimaced.

"Are we telling Bruce about this?" Clark asked.

"No." Slade said without hesitation. "He has one more month till he gives birth and he's already under a lot of stress. This would…" Slade stopped. "I don't even know what this would do to him."

"Does he not know Napier has them?" Kon asked.

"No, he does. He just doesn't know that this is what Napier has been doing to them."

The confusion on Kon's face only grew. "What has been done to them?"

"Kon." Clark said softly. "The baby isn't Bruce's."

That caused Kon's expression to falter. "Then… Whose is it?"

Slade and Clark remained quiet.

The silence had its intended effect and Kon let out a shaky breath. "But they're--"

"Yeah, I know." Slade said with a nod. "Which is why we are not telling Bruce about this until we know where Napier is and I have a knife to his throat. Preferably *in* his throat."

"He must not know they're brothers, right?" Kon stammered. "Right?"

"Even if he did, I doubt that would have stopped Napier. If anything, it would have encouraged him." Slade said listlessly. "After all, inbreeding is an easy way to get rare mutations." He looked down at

the photo in his hands and let out a slow breath. "Looks like the baby has anophthalmia *and* hyperscalae. Napier was probably over the moon."

"Jesus, Slade…" Clark muttered, bringing his hands to his face. "What the fuck are we going to do?"

"I told you. We're going to offer a Kryptonian half fin and pray that's enough."

"And if it isn't?"

Slade didn't reply and Clark didn't push, leaving them in an uneasy silence. One that was eventually broken by Slade walking back towards his boat, leaving Clark and Kon alone on the beach. Kon watched Clark's face carefully. "You okay?" He asked.

"No." Clark said, as he forced himself to blink and breathe. It had been a while since he had done either. "I have no idea what I'm going to tell Bruce."

"Well, nothing for now." Kon said, shoving his hands in his pockets. "Like Slade said, we just gotta wait."

"Right. We just have to wait." He muttered.

In that moment, Clark couldn't think of anything more difficult to do than wait.

Chapter End Notes

You guys: "Hey Kat, you're gonna give us something sweet and wholesome after the hiatus... Right?"

Me: :D

Real talk though, as you guys can see from the new tags and also the fact that I have now chosen not to use Archive warnings, that this fic is going into some pretty heavy territories. If that's not your thing that is cool, I just ask that you don't get mad at me for writing my story how I want to 🥺

My vision has always been that Napier is the worst of the worst and part of that is down to how he treats his mers. Forced fighting and sex is part of the norm for Napier and when we meet him that will be a focus so be warned.

I apologise again for the hiatus, writers block is real and I won't lie, part of the block came from the fact that I know this chapter will be polarising but at the end of the day, this is my story and this is what I'm going with ❤️

Thanks for reading all, and I will see you in the next chapter :) x

Chapter 47

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clark lost track of how long he stayed out on the beach. He half expected Kon to leave, but no, he simply sat himself down on the sand and began sifting his fingers through it. He was trying to think up a game plan, but all attempts at forging one were stopped the moment he imagined seeing Bruce's face. How could he pretend he didn't know what he knew? That he had seen first hand what Napier was doing to his children? He knew Slade would have no such qualms about the secrecy and Clark couldn't help but wish he could do the same. As it were, he knew his limits and his only idea so far that didn't involve a potential catastrophe was flying back to his island and burying his head in the sand.

Obviously he knew he couldn't do that, so it was with great reluctance that he shifted where he stood and let out a long sigh. Kon stood up not even a moment later and bumped his shoulder against Clarks, a non verbal reminder that he was here and it was indeed, time to go.

"He's going to know something is up the minute he sees me." Clark muttered.

Kon hummed in agreement. "Yeah, we should probably get our poker faces under control."

Clark offered a raised brow and Kon's choice of words. "' *Our* ' poker faces?"

"Well, yeah." Kon said, shrugging a shoulder. "Tim and the others will wanna know what we were out here talking about and you know I'm not good at lying."

"You won't need to lie, just omit the truth." Clark said, as if it were really that easy. If it were, he'd have been inside with a warm coffee over an hour ago.

They walked back along the shore until they made their way up onto the porch. He paused, looking up towards the looming entryway. He went to step forward, but felt something holding onto his arm. He turned and saw Kon's hand on his elbow.

“Okay, well if we are going inside, we need to make sure our stories are straight”

“Right.” Clark said, easing his arm free. “The story is, we talked and then we came inside.”

Kon held his gaze, before pressing his lips together. “That’s it?”

“Yeah. That’s it.” At Kon’s less than enthused expression, he continued. “The thing with lying, Kon, is you don't want to overcomplicate it, the minute you do, that’s when you fall into problems.”

“I guess.” Kon said, unconvinced. Despite this, he didn’t try to stop Clark as he stepped inside this time. “But if that doesn’t work, I’m fully blaming you.”

“Got it.”

By some small miracle, Bruce wasn’t out of the pool by the time they walked in, meaning Clark was allowed more time to work on his quote unquote ‘poker face’. The mers that were out of the water, were the two that had been there the last time he was here, as well as Cass, who smiled towards them when she spotted the pair.

“Hello again.” Tim said, leaning back on the tiles. “Did you guys have a good talk?”

Clark chanced a look at Kon to see how he was fairing and was not comforted by what he saw. Kon’s lips were pressed into a thin line, and despite the cool temperature of the room, his forehead began to sweat. “Yeah, it was good, all went well. Better than good, actually. So *so* great.”

Clark’s mouth fell open before he was able to quell the look of minor disbelief and return it to a more placid expression. He knew Kon wasn’t a professional actor, but to see just how *bad* he was made him realize he was a lot better at it than he gave himself credit for.

Before Tim could voice the question that was obviously on his lips, Clark raised his hand and placed it on Kon’s shoulder. He had to think quickly and as a result he could only think of one thing. “Why don't you go get us all something to eat?”

It was approaching dinner time, and even if Clark's stomach wasn't grumbling in frequent intervals, he doubts he would have been able to come up with another idea with how little time he had. Kon immediately jolted at the suggestion and nodded vigorously. "Yeah, sounds good, what do people want? Pizza? I could go for pizza."

And before anyone could respond, he was gone.

"Wow." Was all Tim said when the breeze from Kon's departure settled.

Clark thought of what to say and when he failed to come up with anything, he simply remained silent.

"Something happened, didn't it?" Tim asked evenly, the other mers for the most part attempted to keep their faces neutral and whilst Cass succeeded, Jaime did not.

"It's nothing y'all need to worry about." Clark said, and that did something to make Jaime look less panicked at least. Seizing the moment to change the subject, Clark jerked his head towards the mer in question and asked, "So how did the talk go with your dad?"

He could tell Tim didn't want to drop the subject, could see it from how his brow furrowed together much like Bruce's did when presented with a similarly obtuse Clark. Jaime however began to speak before Tim could, and as such, Clark counted himself safe for now and lowered himself to the ground to sit. "Oh, yeah. It went well for the most part. I didn't realize how sick he was though, Marcos said he was bad on the way there but I just thought it was a cold or something. I was even going to suggest we all went to Paraíso to see mama but I don't think he'd survive the trip..."

"Sal told me a bit about Paraíso. Said it was a haven for mers."

Jaime nodded his head emphatically. "Oh it is, mers and mernans or all different species live on the islands. We all take care of each other and there are no interspecies fights like there are in the open sea. That's what really freaked me out when I left the islands for the first time. Fins fighting other fins, you just don't see it on Paraíso…"

Clark hummed. "It's a wonder more mernans don't know about it."

“Well, it’s hard for mernans to actually get there in the first place, let alone leave.” Jaime pursed his lips. “It’s why mama never left, she knew if she did it was likely she’d be killed.”

“The storms, right?” Clark asked. “Sal said they’re bad around the island.”

Jaime however, only frowned. “Storms?”

“Is that not the reason?”

“I mean, we get storms, but not ones so bad they flip over ships. No, it’s because of Gran Madre. She is the one who makes sure no boats can get in or leave.”

That piqued Clark's curiosity. “‘ *Gran Madre* ’?”

“Yeah. No one knows how or why she's there but she circles the islands and destroys any ships that get too close. Any mernans who fall into the water can swim to the island, but any humans, well, let's just say Gran Madre make sure they don’t get that far.”

Clark frowned. “How can *one* mer sink a ship?”

As Jaime paused, Tim interrupted. “She’s a broodmother; they’re the only mers who can get that big.”

Jaime nodded emphatically. “Yeah, that’s it, she’s a broodmother. Doesn’t have any babies, though. Otherwise she’d be down at the bottom of the ocean, not near the surface. Mama thinks she's too old to have any more babies, so she adopted the island residents instead. She doesn’t like mernans leaving though, so just like she breaks boats that get too near, she does the same with anyone who tries to leave.”

Clark however was still dwelling on what Tim had said. As he did, a conversation he and Bruce had came back to him,

It took a few minutes, most of which were spent with Clark rubbing Blue's back in gentle circles. Eventually though, he turned those steely eyes towards him, and raised his hands. 'I' M N O T G O I N G T O S T A Y L I K E T H I S.'

Blue looked frustrated, embarrassed, and most of all, angry. 'M Y B O D Y I S G O I N G T O C H A N G E.'

Clark felt the weight of those words suddenly hit him. At the time, he didn't know what 'change' Bruce was talking about, but now that he did, he had to figure out how he felt about it. "So… Bruce, he's going to... get like that?"

"Oh, yeah." Jaime said easily, apparently unaware as to how much that idea had rattled Clark. Cass however was offering him her sympathetic gaze. "He'll get huge!" Jaime continued, "from what I've heard, the size of a blue whale is the average, but some can get even bigger. Like Gran Madre. She's gigantic."

"Uh huh." Clark said absently, turning his attention to the water where Bruce was currently dozing. He tried to gauge how he was feeling, and surprisingly, he wasn't scared, there was no desire to run, or even balk at the idea, he was simply surprised. Yet not as much as he thought he would be. Somehow he knew this was what being a broodmother meant, and yet, he couldn't figure out why.

'No-- get away from me!'

~~*'Clark, please! You don't understand!'*~~

'I understand you're a freak!'

Clark shuddered as the memory hit him. Why it did, he didn't know but he knew pulling too long at that thread was a bad idea and so he tried to get his mind towards other things. Non broodmother related things. Sadly, Tim must have not gotten the memo.

"Dad was worried about how you'd react to that." He said, his eyes narrowing as though examining him. "At least I can tell him you only looked a little like you were going to throw up."

“I was just surprised.” Clark said, somewhat sharper than he had intended. “I mean, wouldn’t you be?”

“I guess.” Tim said, with a mild shrug. “But I'm not the one who can fly and lift up skyscrapers.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I get it, I'm weird too.”

“Nothing wrong with being weird.” Tim replied. “We’re all a little weird.”

“Yeah.” Jaime grinned.

Cass nodded.

Clark huffed a laugh. “Yeah, guess you’re right.” He let out a breath and leant back. “So, that’s why your mom never came back to Cottonwood? She couldn’t leave?”

“Yeah, she always told me all about Cottonwood growing up, though. About papa and Marcos. She said when I was old enough I could go swim there and meet them and a few months back, that’s exactly what I did, until…"Jaime's expression became sour.

“Hadal?” Clark ventured.

“Yeah…” Jaime muttered. “He brought me back to his lab and did experiments on me. It was awful, but at least I had Cass, Duke and Steph. If I didn’t have them, I don’t think I'd have been able to handle it.” The mer then turned his attention to Tim, and brushed against his shoulder with a smile. “Then Tim came along and told us about his family, his uncle Slade, and how he would save us. It was like a dream come true.”

“And this was a couple months back?” Clark asked. “How long were you with Hadal?” He asked, directing the question to Cass.

Cass gave a series of chirps, after which Tim spoke. “Cass was with him nearly a year. Steph, eight

months and Duke, six. Cass knew some other mers before we showed up, but…" Tim pressed his lips together. "They didn't make it."

"Oh." Clark let out. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Cass looked down at the floor, offering a quiet trill as well as a shrug of the shoulder. Neither mer translated for her, but Clark didn't need them to. He simply nodded. "At least you're out now, and you never have to see Hadal again."

All the mers hummed at that, at which point Clark felt another breeze and when he turned he saw Kon had returned, his arms now filled with pizzas. "I didn't know what kind to get, so I just got everything."

"Jesus, Kon." Clark muttered, standing up to take some of the boxes from him. When he saw the writing on top, he couldn't place the logo. "Where did you go?"

"New York." Kon replied, as though it were a perfectly reasonable answer.

"Right, of course." Clark said with a roll of the eyes as he sat back down. Kon joined him and the pair began leafing through the boxes and when Clark found one with olives and pepperoni he slid it out. "Can you guys even eat pizza? Duke said most half fins can eat human food, but still."

Jaime nodded. "We can." He then turned towards Kon. "Did you get any with anchovies?"

"Uh, *duh* ." Kon said, going through his own stack and taking out a few pizzas. "All these have extra anchovies on them."

Tim and Jaime eagerly reached for the boxes, and as though on queue Clark heard a chirp of curiosity from the water.

He turned towards it but before he could speak, he heard Tim call out, "It's pizza, dad. You'll like it, come get some."

Bruce did just that, sliding out of the water and saddling up beside Clark. He couldn't help but notice he had a now empty peanut butter jar in his hand. He raised a brow at the boxes and looked at Clark.

“I'm having a slice of pepperoni and olive. You’ll probably like the anchovy one, though.” Clark reached for one of the boxes and wrangled a slice from within. Once he had one he held it up to Bruce. “Try it.”

Bruce sniffed at it, and after tentatively sticking his tongue out on one of the small fishes stuck on top, Clark almost laughed at how his eyes blew wide. Not even a moment later the slice was gone and Bruce was reaching for another.

“I was going to say you got too much Kon, but I forgot Bruce was eating with us.” Jaime said playfully.

“Ooo, who got pizza?” Steph called out as she poked out of the water.

“Kon.” Tim replied. “Come get some.”

Eventually, Duke as well as Dick and Jason found the mountain of pizza, and just as Jaime had stated, even as everyone else grew full, Bruce dutifully continued, eating slice after slice until only a couple of boxes remained. “Mom and Slade can have these ones.” Tim said from where he was reclining, rubbing his stomach in slow circles. “Thanks, Kon.”

“Yeah, thanks Kon.” Steph groaned as she slid sluggishly back to the water. “I'm going to take a nap. Who’s with me?”

Cass nodded, and followed after, as did Duke. Dick and Jason left not long after, leaving Clark, Kon, Tim and a half asleep Bruce.

“You wanna go sleep in the water, hon?” Clark said, petting at Bruce's head that was resting on his lap. The mer however only grumbled and turned to curl into Clark’s stomach.

“He’s comfy.” Tim said for him, his eyes focusing up towards the ceiling.

“I still crazy that you guys can just read each other's minds like that.” Kon said. The flight to New York had apparently had its intended effects as he no longer looked like he was going to keel over at any moment. If anything he was looking at Tim with a friendly ease that reminded Clark of how he sometimes regarded Bruce. He frowned at that thought.

“Yeah, well *I* think it’s crazy you can fly to New York to get pizza.” Tim replied coyly, craning his neck to catch Kon's gaze.

There was something in that look, something that Clark recognised but that he told himself he didn’t recognize for the sake of his own sanity. Noticing his stare, Tim turned his attention towards him. “Are you staying the night here?”

“Uh, no.” Clark said, squashing the non thought down before it absorbed him entirely. “Probably going to go back to Solitude after Bruce's nap.”

“What about you Kon? Are you going to stay the night?”

Kon didn’t look surprised by the question, only quirking his head. “I mean, I could. If your mom was okay with it.”

“She will be.” Tim said easily. “She likes you.”

“She does?” Kon asked, clearly not convinced. “But she said I dressed like a greaser.”

“Why would you think she didn’t like you from that?”

“She didn’t say it like it was a compliment.” Kon grumbled.

“Well, it was.” Tim said with a soft smile. “Besides, I like your jacket.”

At the look, once more, Clark pressed his lips together. *They’re not flirting. This is just how young people talk to each other. You would know if you hadn’t spent the last four years alone on an island.*

At that, Tim slid into the water and Kon stood up, picking up the stack of mostly empty boxes as he did. “I'm gonna give the pizzas to Selina. Lemme know when you head out.”

“Will do.” Clark said with a bob of the head.

He said his goodbyes an hour later, Kon was making himself comfortable in one of the guest rooms and Selina, Slade, Grant and Joey were eating the leftover pizza in the kitchen. With Bruce in his arms, they didn’t say anything as he passed, but there was an edge to Slade’s stare as he walked past.

‘ *Don't tell him,* ’ it said. ‘ *I won't,* ’ his own replied.

And he didn’t. Not even when they got home and Bruce nuzzled against Clark in a way that told him he was going to be sore tomorrow. Not even when he mentioned that he knew what Bruce had meant by ‘change’ all those weeks ago. Not even when Bruce asked him directly if Slade had told him anything about the letter. *No* , Clark had said, *he didn’t say anything* .

Clark did as he was told and kept his mouth shut, and as the days passed, he realized it was a lot easier to omit the truth than he thought it would be.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter?? So soon after the last?? That's crazy!

It's easter break at the moment, which means I have no uni classes. I do have a bunch of uni work, but lets not talk about that.

Pizza party with the batfam! Though are they the batfam in this universe? I guess they're techinically the merbatfam...

Also Kon and Tim... Wonder what's going on there, huh? (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Anyway, let me know your thoughts! Your lovely comments are what keep me going. See you all next time! Take care :)

Chapter 48

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

November 16th 2016

It's been a few days and Bruce hasn't asked about the letter. He probably thinks Napier is just taking his time with the reply, and I haven't exactly told him otherwise. I feel guilty about not telling him the truth, but Slade's right. Bruce has had to deal with so much shit recently, the last thing I want to do is add to his stress with this. Especially as there is nothing we can do right now.

I also called Dinah today. Told her I wanted to have a session. I'm booked in for next week.

November 23rd 2016

I gotta say, it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. We mostly just caught up with one another. Turns out her and Ollie have a kid now. Her name is Laurel. She hates spinach and loves a show called 'Kazoops.'

She asked about Bruce, obviously, and whilst I thought it would be weird to talk about him, it wasn't. The weird part was trying to explain that a version of him from another universe had come along and helped me to realize he didn't want to kill me.

After we finished, she wanted to book me in for an appointment the following week, but I told her I'd get back to her on that. For one, Walter has said that they're nearly done with Slade's house so I need to be on hand for when they're ready. They're a little behind schedule due to adding the tunnel between the homes, but he reckons next week they'll be ready to move over to Solitude and get started on the build. I have another meeting booked with him and Melissa tomorrow to sort out things like wallpaper colours and furnishings. Exciting.

November 24th 2016

I had no idea there were so many different shades of blue. I said I wanted blue accents around the place, and Melissa pulled out a binder of all the different shades they had to choose from. There is sky, azure, navy, lapis, aegean, cerulean, cloud, spruce and sapphire. I could go on. In the end, I told her to pick whichever she thought best and left it at that.

As for everything else, I'm not exactly an interior designer so I told them that short of plastic lawn chairs in the living room, I was fine with anything.

Sadly, the quote unquote 'fun stuff' as Melissa called it, won't be for a couple of months. They first have to deal with the plumbing, electricity and heating before they can start with anything as fun as wallpaper and tiling.

Despite Walter and his team's clear indifference to mers and the dwellings he makes for them, I doubt I can just stay with Blue whilst he and his crew are working on the island. My original idea had been to stay on the boat whilst they worked, but given Bruce is pregnant and Selina is right across the way, I figured we could stay with her. I'm sure she won't mind.

December 1st 2016

We're at Selina's now. Just finished unpacking. Not that there was much to unpack. Just a few pieces of clothing, some photos and this journal. I'm storing everything else in the boat for now.

I gutted the cabin the night before and it felt weird saying goodbye to it this morning. It looked like when I first made it. When it was just four walls on the beach. Not yet a home.

I'm trying not to dwell on it. After all, I'm building a new home.

December 2nd 2016

I went to see Bruce and the others mers at the pool this morning and found out that Jaime had left for Paraíso during the night.

I went to check on Marcos and tell him as much but it turns out I didn't need to. Jaime had come by before leaving to say his goodbyes to him and Sal. Still, it was nice to check in on Marcos, especially after the whole 'finding out you're part mer and you're mom isn't dead' thing he's been going through. He seemed to be doing alright, and despite how frail Sal was looking, he was in good spirits. Hell, he didn't call me a moron once whilst I was there.

December 8th 2016

The morning started like any other. Since he had been staying at Selina's, he'd been growing somewhat accustomed to his morning shower, fresh underwear and hot coffee every morning. It was surreal to think how he had been able to go without them all for so long, as now that they were back in his life, he was unable to imagine going without them for even a week.

He found Jason in the kitchen when he went down for his aforementioned coffee. Despite the teens' distaste for him, he'd been a lot less hostile to Clark since he and Bruce had moved in. Perhaps it was because he knew that they were going to be there for a while and making things miserable for Clark was liable to backfire on him if he weren't careful. As it stood, Bruce had already given Jason a stern series of chirps that Clark had to assume was the mer equivalent of the lectures he'd received as a teen the night they arrived. He could only assume Jason didn't want a repeat, and as such, simply bobbed his head at Clark when he walked in, with no snide comment preceding or following it.

Clark poured himself some coffee and set himself down at the counter, pulling the paper towards him as he did. For a time, he and Jason sat in comfortable silence. That was until the teen quirked his head and lowered his own cup. "I kinda figured you'd be in more of a rush."

"What do you mean?" Clark asked, turning his attention away from the paper. There wasn't much of note in it. Though he did spy a coupon for one free Danish from the local bakery with every purchase over twenty dollars that he was *definitely* going to be taking.

“I thought mom told you.” Jason said with a frown, then he shook his head. “No, wait. She came in here and told *me* to tell you. My mistake.”

“Tell me what?”

Jason shrugged. “That dad’s giving birth.”

Clark dropped his cup, coffee and porcelain spilling across the counter. “He’s *what* ?”

“Yeah, sorry, should have said that when you came in. He’s giving birth right now.” Jason wordlessly reached for the now coffee stained paper. He slid it in front of himself and proceeded to read the now blurred words. “May wanna go check on him.”

With a burst of speed, Clark was at the pool, his eyes wide as he scanned the area. “Bruce? *Bruce!* Where--”

He spotted him then. He was lying on his side along the artificial shore of the pool, as Selina and Slade sat nearby, the latter holding a shallow metal tub in his arms as the former rubbed circles into Bruce’s back. Clark ran towards them. A panicked streak of words leaving him as he did, “Bruce are you okay, are you in pain? Do you need ice?”

Selina was the one to respond as she let out an exasperated sigh. “There you are! We thought you were gonna miss it.” She ushered him over with her free hand. “Did Jason not come get you?”

“No, he didn’t.” Clark bristled as he lowered himself to the ground. Despite his annoyance, he decided to channel that emotion into something more positive for the time being and deal with Jason later. He reached for Bruce’s face and tucked his hair behind his ear. “You okay, hon?” He murmured.

A quiet trill was Bruce's response.

Clark nodded. “That's good.” He said, his relief palpable. He then sat back, suddenly unsure of what to do with himself. Unlike what he had seen on TV, this birth felt altogether less hectic, with boredom being the main emotion on display and not nearly enough people running around.

“You know how long this is gonna take?” Clark asked, turning to Slade who had taken to patting the metal tub before him rhythmically. Clark could see now that it was filled with water.

“Why? You got somewhere to be?”

“No, I just want to know if we’re gonna be here for several hours or not.”

“Hard to say, some births take no time at all, whilst others can take all day. It just depends.”

“Alright.” Clark said, as he sidled up beside Selina and took over the job of rubbing circles into Bruce’s back.

Turns out they were in the 'no time at all' category. After a few minutes, Bruce gestured for the metal tub. Slade slid it towards him and as he did, Bruce raised himself and lowered his body over it, facing down towards the floor. Before Clark could even question what was happening, Bruce’s body tensed.

“Is he…?” but Clark cut himself off as he realized that yes, yes he was.

No less than ten seconds later, with little more than a furrowed brow to show for it, Bruce had indeed given birth.

Clark wasn't expect screaming and blood, but to witness the sheer lack of anything that was Bruce giving birth was more than slightly jarring. If he didn’t know what he was doing he was sure he could convince himself that Bruce had just forgotten how to sit in the tub.

Once it was over, Bruce slid himself off of the metal and laid down beside it, peering into the water as he let out several chirps, gesturing to Clark.

“He wants you to come look.” Slade said softly.

Clark didn't need to be told twice and he approached the tub slowly. He peered into the water and saw three eggs floating along the bottom.

“Holy crap…” he muttered.

The egg sacks were not translucent. They were inky black in colour, and jelly-like in shape. Despite this, Clark could see the bodies inside each one perfectly. They were still so small, with their little hands and feet wiggling around inside. All accept one.

“I knew it.” Clark said, smiling. “One has a tail.” He watched as the tail inside the egg wriggled, as though it were aware of the sudden attention on it.

“You hear that, Bruce.” Slade said, patting Bruce on the back. “You got one.”

Bruce smiled at that, laying down with a sigh of what sounded like relief.

“One?” Clark asked, a slight edge to his voice. “We have *three* .”

“Clark.” Selina said softly, her hand coming up to rest along the small of his back.

As she eyed him, he realized he should drop this conversation, and yet... “Was it that big of a deal for you?” Clark asked, turning his attention to Bruce. “For one of them to be a half fin?”

“Hey, he just gave birth to *your* children. Don’t be a dick to him.” Slade frowned.

“I'm just asking ‘cause if it were me they could all have had legs or fins and I’d have been fine with either.”

“You have to understand, mixed pods work differently than a quote unquote ‘normal’ family.” Selina

said softly. “The mers in the pod raise the other mers in the water, and the mernans raise the other mernans on land.”

“That still doesn’t explain why you’re so relieved to have a half fin.”

But before Bruce could reply, Slade huffed. “I think you’re blowing this a little out of proportion, Clark.”

Selina however, reached for Clark’s back, holding her hand there. “It’s just that if you guys didn’t have a half fin, Bruce wouldn’t be able to do much to help raise the kids.”

Clark’s frown only grew. “Maybe I'm wrong here, but I was under the impression we were going to raise *all* of our kids *together* .”

“And you will, it’ll just be… *different* than what you’re expecting.” She said, and as she did, Clark knew she was speaking from experience. He thought of the boys, of Dick and Jason living on land whilst Tim was in the water with Bruce. At the time he hadn’t even questioned it, and yet the thought of it now upset him more than he wanted to admit.

“Look, just because that's what you’ve done in the past, doesn't mean you have to do it now, in case you’ve forgotten, I'm not human. Our *kids* won't be human. We don’t need to do anything separately.”

“Yeah, but you can’t sync, and you won't even get in the water with him.” Slade shrugged. “Doesn’t exactly make you a prime candidate to co-parent a half fin.”

Clark clenched his jaw. “I told you I was going to go in the water.”

“Yeah, you said that two months ago.”

“Bruce was *pregnant*.”

“Yeah and now he ain’t so,” Slade gestured vaguely towards the back wall where the ocean lay just beyond. “Hop to it.”

“Right now?” Clark asked, indignantly. “Bruce just gave *birth* .”

“Yeah, and I'm sure despite that he's still pissed that the only way he can tell you what's going on in his head is with his hands and through us.” He said the last part with a small gesture to himself and Selina.

At this, Clark’s expression softened. “Bruce, I've told you I will be patient whilst you sign, so just--”

“--Nuh uh, the man just gave birth to your kids he doesn't need to do shit, *you* on the other hand are just being a coward--”

“--I think you’re both making this into way bigger of a deal than it needs to be--”

A low growl cut them off.

All three fell silent and Bruce raised his hands. Despite his stern expression, the words he signed were anything but. ‘I’M READY IF YOU ARE.’

Clark stared at those fingers for far longer than necessarily, the words in his mind churning as he tried to come up with what to say with them. “Are you sure? We can wait until…” Until...? Until *what*? Perhaps he was being a coward. He had told himself he was ready for this, but that was when the idea of doing it was a vague thought he had voiced when Bruce had been in the tank. When they couldn’t do it due to Bruce being pregnant. But now that that excuse was residing safely in the tub before him, he realized he really was scared of going into the water. “What if it goes wrong?” *What if I see it?* “You’ve not done this before, have you?”

‘DO YOU TRUST ME?’ Bruce signed.

“Of course I do.” Clark murmured.

And that was that. Without any other words spoken, the tub holding his children was lowered into the water. Bruce gently scooped up the eggs from within and took them to the bottom of the tank, setting them down inside a rocky outcropping. Once that was done, the four of them took Slade's boat out into the open water. Bruce slid into the waves easily once they came to a stop. Clark, on the other hand, needed a moment.

“You scared?” Slade asked, leaning against the railing.

Clark watched the water, hypnotized by Bruce’s form swimming beneath the surface. “Would you make fun of me if I was?”

“No. I would be too if I were in your shoes. I don’t know what you’re about to experience. This isn’t just awakening your sync. This is something else entirely.”

“But I have to do it.” Clark said, clenching his fists.

“You’ll be fine.” Selina said, approaching him. “Remember, Bruce is going to be right there with you.”

It took a few more minutes, but eventually Clark got into the water, fighting the urge to flee as he felt Bruce’s hand on his, slowly pulling him down.

As they descended down into the deep, Clark felt his mind begin to thump with a feeling he was unable to place. Fear? Excitement? Trepidation? He didn’t know, all he knew was that Bruce was with him and the water was growing dark, yet, he was not in darkness. No, Bruce glowed with a faint blue shimmer as they descended even deeper. He focused on that as much as he could.

But as they went lower, Bruce changed. His eyes became black and his mouth pulled open revealing his sharp teeth. For a moment, Clark felt fear, ripe and hot in his chest. This was taking him back to a time he could barely remember, a time that only dreams reminded him of.

‘Can/you/hear/me/now?’ He heard a voice ask in his mind. He only nodded.

‘When/we/get/to/the/bottom,/I’m/going/to/try/and/awaken/your/sync./I’ve/never/done/it/before/so/I/don’t/know/how/it/will/go,/but/just/try/to/relax/and/don’t/fight/me.’ Bruce eyed him, and Clark again, only nodded.

They kept descending, to the point where Clark was certain the world should logically end. How anything could go this deep he didn’t know, and yet, here they were, going deeper still. Bruce’s body was now as it had been in the tank, and yet, it still continued to shift, his stomach retreating even further, his ribcage getting even more compressed. Yet, lower still they went.

Until suddenly, they were at the bottom, the high walls of the trench towering over them on either side. Clark felt his heart hammer in his chest, and yet despite the fear, despite every fibre of his being telling him he should run away. He stayed. He stayed and stared into Bruce's black eyes. ‘Are/you/ready?’ He asked.

A single nod.

‘Remember/what/I/said,/Clark./Don’t/fight/me./It’s/just/me./Remember/that./It’s/only/me.’

Clark didn’t have time to react or even blink before he felt Bruce's forehead against his own. He didn’t know what he expected. A small part of him thought that would be it, that from that touch alone they’d be set.

But that wasn’t what happened.

Pain lanced through Clark's skull, and as it did, his mouth pulled open to let out a muffled scream.

The world went black.

It

all

went

black.

‘Why are you moving away from me?’

~~‘You/—you can sync?’~~

‘What’s syncing?’

What… what is going on?

What are you doing to me?

‘--You know, I’ve never seen a mer like you before.’

No. Get out of my head. Don’t look--

~~‘I’m an abyssal fin. My mother says we’re the oldest mers around.’~~

Get out. Get out. Get out.

‘--Hey, you guys have sports down here? Like, do you play football with the jellyfish?’

~~‘No. What’s ‘football’?’~~

‘Oh man, you’d love it! First you need a ball--’

Why are you doing this? Stop it. Please.

~~‘What sort of food do you have up there?’~~

‘Lots of stuff. We have loads of animals that we eat up there. Like cows and chicken. But we also make stuff, too. Out of other things.'

No. Stop.

‘I still don’t know your name, by the way.’

~~'It's Bruce. What's yours?'~~

'Clark.'

~~'Clark. I like the sound of it.'~~

'Well, I like the sound of Bruce.'

This is-- why are you. Get out! Get out already!

'You have a family, Bruce?'

~~'Yeah, the whole trench is my family.'~~

'That's a big family. I only have my mama and papa.'

~~'No brothers or sisters?'~~

'No. I always wanted one though. It gets lonely on the ranch.'

Please stop. Please.

'Don't you have like, girl mermaids you'd rather talk to?'

~~'I could ask you the same thing.'~~

'I like talking to you, though. You're different. Girls are weird.'

Why are you doing this?

Please. Please stop, I can't-- It hurts…

'I want to remember you… I hate always forgetting when I go up to the surface.'

~~—'There.. there is a way to have you remember. My mother told me that because we're the oldest mers we can do something to awaken other mers syncs. Letting them talk to other species. My mama can talk to every type of mer in the ocean.'~~

'Do you think she could do that to me? Even though I'm not a mer?'

~~—'I could ask her.'~~

'That would be cool! If I could remember things Bruce, I'd be able to bring you whatever you wanted! We could talk all the time and-- and--'

~~—'Don't get too excited, Clark. She might say no.'~~

Don't.

Don’t take me there.

I don’t want to go.

Don’t make me go.

Don’t make me go, Bruce.

Please.

Don't.

Bruce.

Please.

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's finished their first year of uni? Me! Sort of why i've been quiet, May was the last month of the term and I was busy with a project. Now I have three months of freedom and I plan to get a lot of writing done during then!

Thank you guys for all your lovely comments so far. I hope you enjoyed this chapter, let me know if you did! Catch you all next time B)

Chapter 49

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 8th 1988

"Lights out, hon."

Clark poked his head out from underneath his bed sheet fort, a flashlight in one hand and a book spread open in front of him. "Five more minutes, Ma?"

"No, no." She said, coming forward and reaching for the flashlight. Clark passed it over with only mild grumbling. "Tell you what, on Saturday you can stay up late."

Clark perked up immediately. "Really?"

"Really." Martha said, turning the flashlight off and reaching for the book. "But you gotta do all your chores this week and go to bed *now*."

Despite knowing there was bound to be a catch, Clark deflated all the same upon hearing it. "Okay…"

"Alright, then…" Martha leant forward, placing a chaste kiss on Clark's head. "Sleep well, hon."

She shut the door after her and once Clark heard her footsteps retreat back down the corridor, it took everything in him to not go crazy as he waited for his parents to eventually go to sleep. It was only ever an hour at most after his own bedtime, but that single hour felt like an eternity when he was so desperate to go to the one place that had been absorbing his entire mind as of late.

At the start of the summer, he had started swimming in the ocean. Nearly every night he'd gone out to swim, and for whatever reason it was no longer a simple desire to cool off and explore. There was something else buried in his mind that was causing him to want to go back. To delve to the very

bottom of the sea every night. When he tried to poke at it, to try and understand what that feeling was, he only ended up with a headache. Now, he simply allowed the feeling to possess him when night came.

Once he heard his parents' lamps switch off, he immediately jumped from bed. He went to his dresser and opened the top drawer. He pulled out his swim trunks and quickly got changed into them. He debated bringing anything else with him, but he never did on his swims, and yet, some part of him kept wanting to. He just couldn't figure out why.

He found a packet of half eaten M&M's in his pants pocket. He had begun eating them whilst at school, and intended to finish them off when he got home, but forgot. He looked down at the packet and for whatever reason, that felt right. He slid it into his swim trunks pocket and went to the window.

Before he got there though, he eyed the unmade bed and turned his attention to his parents room. They didn't usually check up on him in the night, but just in case they did, he went to his bed and rearranged his pillow to look vaguely Clark shaped. He then brought the blanket up high so that it was fully covered.

After that, he approached the window and opened it. He took a deep breath, and savoured the scent. Once you got past the smell of farmland and wheat, there was something else in the air. Salt and sand. The sea.

He hopped out of the window and landed on the ground underneath. He turned back once more, and after confirming that his parents were still laying in bed asleep, he sprinted across the fields.

At this time of night, there was no one else around. He was free to sprint down the dusty farm roads until he came to the beach. He didn't even pause as he ran towards the lapping waves. He dove down between them the first moment he were able to.

There was something about the feeling of water against his skin that set him alight in every way possible. His nerve endings, his mind, his entire body rang with an energy that he couldn't even fathom. It felt right to be here. Land was fine, but this? This was otherworldly. This was nirvana.

He swam past the shoals and spied some mers off in the distance. He made sure to avoid them. There was a steep drop off not too far from Smallville and once he reached it, he paused and stood along the edge. Before him was nothing but darkness so profound it should have felt suffocating. But it didn't, for Clark could see miles into that darkness. Could see the fish swimming, the whales sleeping, the

mers talking. He looked up towards the last remnants of moon light and with his eyes closed, he stepped off the edge and fell down into the abyss.

It took him a few minutes, but eventually he could feel coarse sand between his toes. He looked around, trying to figure out what was drawing him down here, and eventually he spied it. A pool of shimmery smoke beckoned him and he quickly swam over to its edge.

He sat down along the molluscs and rocks and stared into the liquid. It was hypnotizing. This must have been what was drawing him down here. As he sat, he could swear memories of this place started to come back to him. They were hazy, but they were there. Why was he having trouble remembering?

Just as he watched the rippling surface, Clark saw something move along the edge. A small eel swam along the surface before plunging into the smoke. Clark watched it intently, and almost gasped upon seeing it come back out of the water, writhing.

It died not long after. It proceeded to float there along the surface.

That was until something reached for it.

Clark watched as a hand came out across the water and took the eel. Then, it brought it to its teeth and snapped down on its head.

Clark however, only frowned. As the creature's black eyes slid onto him, his mind flodded with images and memories. There was the reason he came down here. It wasn't the pool, it was who frequented the pool. 'Bruce?'

The mer in question paused, looking up at Clark. 'Oh. Clark.' He swallowed down the eel, looking embarrassed. 'How long have you been there?'

'Not that long…' Clark thought, shaking his head. 'I couldn't remember why I wanted to come down here at first, then I saw you and it all came back to me.'

'Sorry, I wasn't focusing. I was watching at the eel.' Bruce took another bite of it, though this time he kept his mouth shut as he chewed. 'So, did you remember anything when you went

up this time?'

Clark almost voiced a quiet 'no' just as he always did until he remembered. 'Oh wait, I did! Sort of.' He reached into his pocket. 'I brought you some chocolate to try!'

'Wow!' Bruce said, as he pushed away from the rocks and swam over to Clark. The half eaten eel forgotten along the way. 'You really remembered?'

Clark felt his cheeks grow warm. 'Well, kinda. It was sort of like this… nagging thought that was telling me to bring something. I couldn't figure out why though. Until now that is.'

Bruce however wasn't paying much attention to him as he looked at the packet in Clark's hand. 'What are they?'

'M&M's. They're candy-covered chocolate. Here.' Clark opened the pack, taking one out. 'Try it.'

Bruce did just that, and reached for the candy. He took it and delicately placed it between his teeth. He clamped his jaw down on the candy. The shell shattered and a few moments later Bruce's eyes blew wide. 'Wow.'

'They're nice, huh?' Clark said, grinning. 'You can have the pack if you want. If I remember to, I'll try and bring you some more human foods.' He wondered if he'd be able to bring one of Ma's pie down here. He was sure if he was fast enough it wouldn't get too soggy.

Bruce only nodded as he took the packet from Clark and began shovelling the contents into his mouth hastily. Clark only smiled as he watched, and when Bruce was finished he came up close to Clark, a pout on his lips. Clark let out a laugh, though 'laugh' might be too charitable considering all that was heard was a quiet bubble. 'I don't have anything else. You'll have to wait until next time.'

'You're not going to remember...' Bruce grumbled.

'Hey, I remembered this time, didn't I?'

Bruce rolled his eyes. ~~‘Barely.’~~

‘Well, what was that you were talking about last time, that whole making me be able to remember coming down here thing?’ Clark asked. ‘You said you'd ask your mama about it.’

Bruce made a face as he pulled back. ~~‘I asked her.’~~ He brought his tail in close to his body, hugging it. ~~‘She said no.’~~

‘What?’ Clark asked, frowning. ‘Why?’

Bruce looked away. ~~‘I don’t know..’~~

‘Well, that’s a load of bull honky.’ Clark said, standing up. He didn’t intend on going anywhere, but he felt strongly enough about this that sitting felt no longer acceptable. ‘We’re friends, aren't we? So why can’t I lean how to sync with you properly?’

~~‘I don’t know..’~~ Bruce muttered, his eyes downcast. ~~‘If she told me why Clark, I'd tell you, but she didn’t say.’~~

‘Well then I guess I better go talk to her myself.’ Clark said, crossing his arms resolutely.

~~‘What?’~~ Bruce asked, his eyes wide. ~~‘You can’t do that.’~~

‘Why not?’

~~‘You can't just go talk to my mother.’~~

‘But why?’

Bruce frowned. ‘I don’t know. But I do know that you can’t.’

Clark however, only shook his head. ‘Bruce do you want us to keep hanging out?’

Despite the depth and darkness, Clark still saw Bruce's cheeks flush. “Yes.”

‘And do you want me to bring you chocolate and other Earthly goods when we do hang out?’

A faint smile appeared on his lips. “Yes.”

‘Then take me to your mama!’ Clark said, clasping his hands together. ‘Come on, I'll talk some sense into her, you’ll see.’

It took a few more attempts at persuasion, but eventually Bruce began to swim and Clark followed dutifully along after. It took a little under a half an hour but eventually they came across a massive fissure in the ground. Clark couldn't see the end of it, nor the bottom. He looked up to where he knew the sky was, and then turned his attention downward. ‘I didn't even know the ocean went this deep…’ he muttered, before turning to Bruce.

‘My mother is all the way at the bottom. Will you be okay down there?”

Clark didn't know. He’d been deep before, but this was *very* deep. Then again, he wouldn’t know unless he tried. So he just sent Bruce a nod. ‘Yeah, I'll be okay.’

With that, Bruce began to swim downward and Clark trailed along not far behind. At first Clark thought they were alone down here, but eventually he began to hear the astronomically slow heart beats of other mers in the trench, could see the faint glow of their scales within the shelves dug into the side of the Earth and as they passed them. They all watched him as they passed. He turned his attention to Bruce. ‘I take it they’ve never seen someone with two legs this far down before.’

Bruce nodded. ‘They’re wondering what you are.’

Clark could understand that. Before his parents came clean about what he really was, he often wondered the same, too. He however didn't feel the need to talk about it to a bunch of mers he didn't even know and instead continued to follow after Bruce.

Eventually they reached the very bottom and when Bruce turned to Clark, Clark had to fight to hide his grimace. Bruce's body had receded even further into itself. His eyes were now glassy orbs with the lids fully retracted. Whilst he had done a good job of schooling his face, his mind was a whole other matter if Bruce's eye roll was anything to go by. 'I don't look that well...'

'Do they not have mirrors at the bottom of the ocean… or…?'

Bruce came forward then, swiping at Clark's head who gave a faux gasp at the hit. As Clark rubbed the spot giving a few fake 'ows' Bruce sent him a wry smile and turned his attention to a large opening just beside them. 'My mother is in that cavern.' Bruce said pointing in there. 'Just let me talk to her first, okay?'

Clark nodded and after Bruce swam in a little ways they were immediately confronted with an ever older and uglier looking mer. Clark was definitely unable to school his face this time, and the mer turned to him with fierce eyes as a result. 'Alfred!' Bruce said to the mer. 'This is my friend Clark, the one I was telling you about!'

Alfred's expression only grew more severe as he looked at the young mer. 'Mother was happy [illegible] was all he said. Despite being his brother, he looked way older than Bruce, with rough lines running across his face and body.

Whatever confidence Clark managed to infuse Bruce with was gone in an instant and he suddenly looked all the more meek. 'But...'

'Brucie,' Alfred said softly, bringing his hands to mers shoulder. 'Mother has already left to find you [illegible] The mers eyes darted to him and despite only being on him for a grand total of two seconds, Clark still felt the weight of the look all the same. 'I-I'm sorry.'

'Well, she hasn't met him!' Bruce said resolutely. 'I'm sure when she does she'll change her mind.'

Alfred looked like he was about to object, but in the end, he didn't. He heaved a sigh and swam past them in a quick burst. ~~//Can't set up bute don't say I didn't warn you.//~~

Once they were alone. Clark turned to Bruce with a tight frown. ~~'Your brother is a butthole.'~~

Even though Clark could tell Bruce wasn't in a smiling mood at that moment, a small one touched his lips all the same. ~~'Yeah...he thinks Cause he's the oldest he can boss us all around.'~~

'Yeah, I remember you saying you had a big family.' Clark said as they continued their way deeper into the cavern.

~~'Oh, yeah, my mama birthed all of us here in the trench. I have like fifty brothers and sisters.'~~

Clark balked. 'Fifty?'

~~'Yeah, but in my litter, it's just me, my sister Talia, my other sister Kate and my brother, Tom.'~~ Bruce turned to him, a smug smile on his face. ~~'I'm the oldest.'~~

'Cool.' Clark said with a grin. 'Do you get to boss them all around like Alfred does?'

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Bruce however made a face. ~~'No../My sister is technically the one in charge. Mama says she's gonna be the next broodmother when she's old enough.'~~

Clark paused. 'Broodmother?'

~~'I told you. My mama birthed all of my brothers and sisters but she's getting really old. She told me we're her last litter, so when Talia is old enough she's gonna become the next broodmother and I'll be her guard.'~~ Bruce said, sticking his thumb to his chest. ~~'And I'm gonna be a great guard.'~~
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‘Scrawny thing like you?’ Clark said, with a huff. ‘Not likely.’

‘Hey.’ Bruce said, bumping against Clark’s shoulder.

Clark almost asked how much longer it would be, but just then, the cavern they were swimming through opened up considerably. Before him was a large pile of rocks that nearly filled the cavernous space entierly. He turned to Bruce. ‘So where is your mama?’ Clark asked, his eyes scanning around the room.

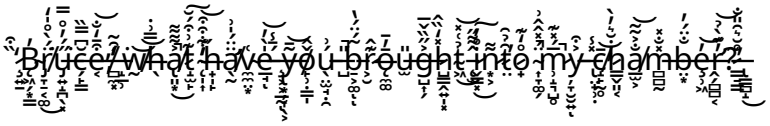
‘What do you mean, she’s right there!’ Bruce said, and after following his pointed finger, Clark’s eyes landed on the mound in the centre of the room once more.

He had thought it was a pile of rocks.

But it wasn’t.

His mouth fell open.

The mer before him wasn’t like one he had ever seen before. She was enormous, the size of a blue whale, maybe even bigger. The top of her head was what Clark had seen. There was no hair there, only large, plate-like scales. As he watched, the form moved, and that head slowly rose and turned its attention to him. Her eyes were as large as soccer balls, and when they landed on him, a thunderous voice filled his mind.



‘Bruce, what have you brought into my chamber?’

A headache quickly blossomed in Clark’s head and he turned to Bruce, hoping for an explanation. He didn't get one however as he noticed Bruce's frightened expression wasn’t even looking at him. ‘He’s my friend, mother. I want you to help me activate his sync.’ He brought his hands together. ‘Please.’

The mer sat up further and brought her arms out. She folded them under her chest and Clark was worried she might hit her head on the top of the cavern, but she didn’t. From this new position, Clark

was left to stare up at her, his heart pounding as he took in her body.

The dark scales covered her entirely, unlike Bruce there was no milky skin on her front, and her face was even more contorted than Bruce's, her nose was gone, as were her lips, revealing only sharp, blackened teeth. ~~'Bruce, my child. What you are asking for is impossible.'~~ She said, as she shook her head, reaching her hand out towards him in what Clark could only assume was an attempt at comfort.

Bruce however, only swatted at that hand, his face suddenly alive with anger. ~~'You said you could do it! So then why won't you when I ask? He's my friend, mother. Please!'~~

Something in the mer expression shifted, and Clark starkly realized she was smiling. ~~'Your friend? My darling he is not your friend.'~~

Clark couldn't help it, he threw his hand out towards her, waving an accusatory finger. 'What to you know, huh? Just 'cause you're bigger and uglier than all these other mers doesn't make you smarter than them.'

Bruce turned to him, horrified, but his mother only looked at Clark with mild curiosity. ~~'It seems Bruce is doing a good job with his proxy sync.'~~ She said, somewhat impressed. ~~'You may be capable of syncing with us, but you will never be one of us.'~~

~~'But he does it! He'd to be one of us, mother. He can just sync with me while we hang out!.'~~ Bruce came up closer to her, wrapping his arms around her wrist. ~~'Please, mama.'~~

She only shook her head, her hand falling limp. ~~'You still don't understand. He will only be able to sync if he becomes one of us. If he joins our pod. If he doesn't... his sync will never truly work.'~~

Clark looked up at the mer, raising a brow. 'What if I wanna be part of the pod, huh? You don't know, I might.'

Clark wished he wasn't looking at those teeth when Bruce's mothers lips curled further upward. ~~'You wish to join my family?'~~

Clark crossed his arms. 'I wanna be friends with Bruce. I wanna hang out with him. I wanna remember to bring him stuff from the surface that I know he'll like and if that means joining your pod, I'll do it!'

He didn't miss the look of quiet awe on Bruce's face as he looked resolutely at his mother. Slowly, she moved her hand. Though it looked less deliberate and more as though she was incapable of moving faster. Once one of her hands were laid flat out before him, like a pedestal, she stopped. ~~Come here.~~

Clark wanted to say she could do whatever weird mer magic she needed to do from there but quickly realized that wouldn't exactly work given his earlier conviction. Slowly, he swam towards her hand and when he reached it, he sat on her palm, looking up at those black eyes. ~~I will bring you to my~~ ~~forehead. Once we touch, you will accept it, you will be one of us.~~

Clark swallowed. 'Okay.'

Then he noticed something

Something he wished he hadn't.

Don't. Don't show me. Not again--

'What… what is that?' He asked, his shaky finger pointing towards what he had only just noticed.

No. Please, I don't want to.

~~*Don't fight this, Clark, you need to remember.*~~

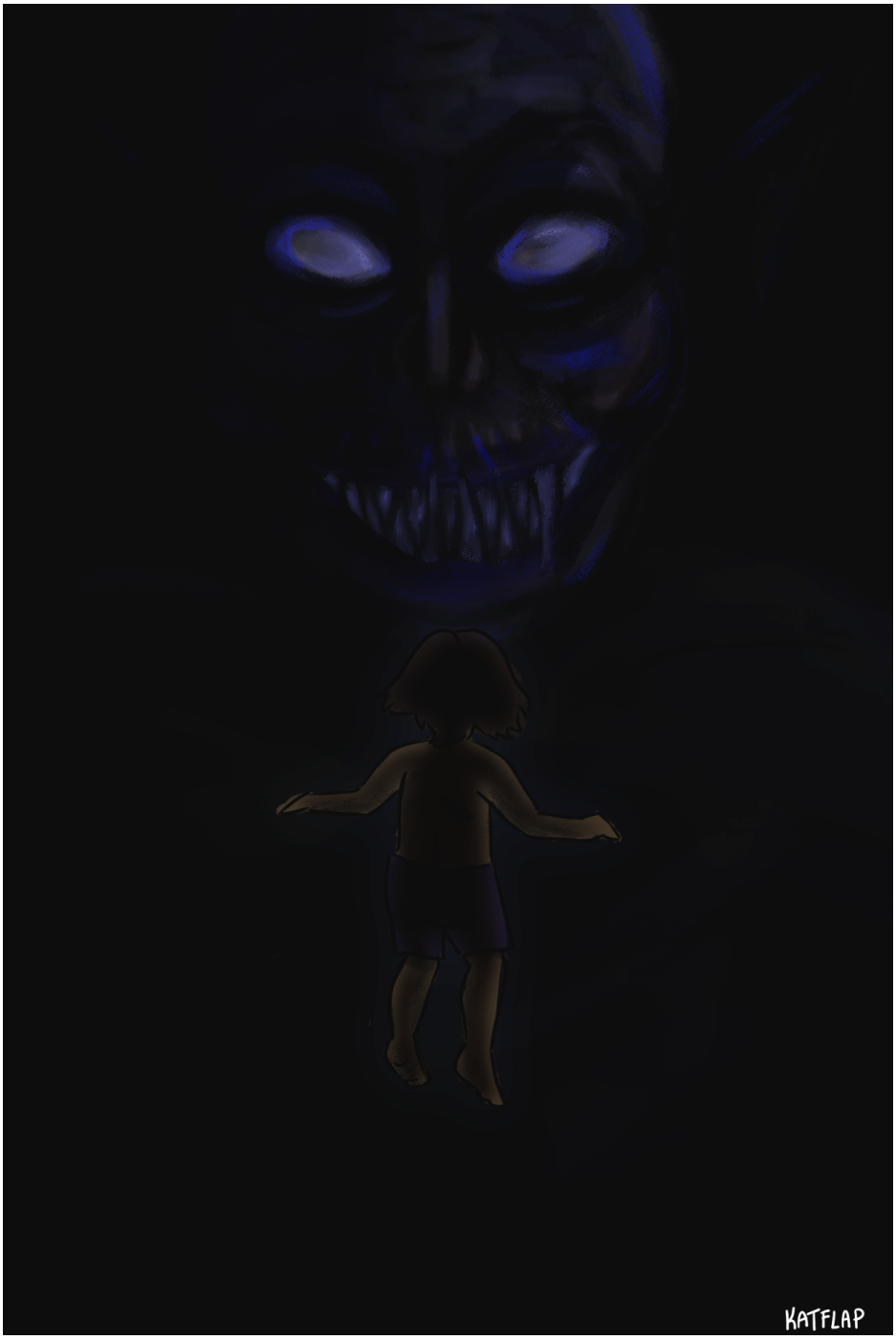
In the dark they were just barely visible. Large lumps all along the side of her body. They looked like sacks of skin, and Clark could have sworn he saw one twitch.

'Oh, these? She asked, her head tilting. 'These are my mates.'

'Your… mates?' Clark asked his eyes focused on one of those lumps. He tried everything to stop his heart from hammering. He fought back the urge to suck in a mouth full of air that he knew wasn't there. His chest was burning as were his eyes. Yet he couldn't look away and whether it was curiosity or fear, he focused even harder on those sacks

Within each laid a skeleton. Within each laid a nervous system. With each of them was a lump of pink matter floating where Clark knew a head would have been.

'What… what… are you-- is--' His mind rambled and when he looked up at those black orbs they were looming ever closer.



“Come my child, let me awaken what most think dead.”

But Clark jolted away, his mouth opening as he screamed, a string of bubbles erupting from him.

He licked his legs out and scrambled away. He didn't hear much. Couldn't see anything beyond the darkness. His eyes were screwed shut. He didn't want to see anymore. He wanted to block it all out. To get rid of what he saw. Those mers. Those mers were *attached* to her.

He knew Bruce was following him. He could hear him swimming furiously to try and keep up with him, but Clark didn't stop, he simply scrambled through the water like a mad man, hoping to scrub the image from his mind as he did. 'Clark! where are you going?' Bruce called out.

'The fuck away from here!' He felt himself scream back. He paused, whirling in the water to stare wide eyed at Bruce. 'She's a monster!'

'She's my mother!' Bruce said, approaching him. 'I thought you'd understand.'

'Understand?' Clark yelled. 'She has people *attached* to her, Bruce! Your dad is in a sack on her fucking hip! Why the Hell would you think I'd understand that?'

Bruce grew quiet, and whether it was the utterly broken look in his eyes or Clark's fear catching up with him, he turned and swam.

Yet despite those words, Bruce dutifully followed him, occasionally calling out. He'd say his name, plead for him to stop, but Clark kept moving all the same.

Once they were back by the lake, Clark felt a surge of relief from being somewhere familiar flood him, he slowed by a fraction and that was all it took. He felt Bruce grab his ankle.

'No-- get away from me!' Clark screamed. He was going to be pulled back, taken back to that cavern. He was going to join those mers.

'Clark, please! You don't understand!' Bruce's eyes were wide and frantic, his grip only growing tighter.

'I understand you're a freak!'

Clark's leg jutted out. It didn't even feel as though he were in charge of the movement, the limb simply snapped forward and collided with Bruce. It hit him in the chest, and Bruce let out a choked cry as he let go. His face crumpled further as he let out a sob.

‘Bruce, shit, I'm--’ but he didn’t finish that sentence, as Bruce looked up at him in fear, mirroring Clark’s own. He’d hurt him. He had really hurt him.

Bruce’s face screwed into a sob filled frown and he fled, calling for the creature that was his mother as he did. Clark remained motionless in the water above the misty lake, until eventually he swam up towards the sky.

As he swam through the water, the memory of the night began to fade. The closer he got to the shimmery water above, the less he remembered, until eventually. All that remained were those eyes, those teeth, those--

No. He told himself. Never again. Never go into the water again. If you don't, the memory will fade. You need to stay away.

Never.

Again.

Never.

Again.

Never .

‘Bruce?’

Again.

‘Bruce. I-- I don’t know what came over me.’

Never.

‘I’m sorry. I’m so sorry for hurting you. Please don’t hate me.’

Again.

~~*‘Don’t fight this.’*~~

Never.

‘What do you mean?’

Again.

~~*‘Let me in. Just let me in, Clark.’*~~

NO.

NO.

NO.

‘Bruce, please, I--’

~~*‘Let me in. I’m not going to hurt you.’*~~

HE LIES.

YOU'LL BE ON HIM, TOO.

A HELPLESS SACK.

UNABLE TO SCREAM.

UNABLE TO DIE.

'No, don't-- Stay away--'

~~*'Clark. It's okay. It's me.'*~~

In the darkness before him was now a shimmering presence. He saw a small mer, hovering above a misty surface. He doesn't see the thing. He doesn't see the sacks. He only sees Bruce. Small, sweet Bruce as he first remembered him. He held his hand out towards Clark, beckoning him.

~~'Are you ready?'~~ He asked.

'I don't know.' He replied, his voice small, just like how he was on that night. In this memory of themselves. 'I'm scared.'

~~'Don't be.'~~ Bruce said as he only smiled. ~~'It's just me.'~~

It's just Bruce. He told himself as he slowly inched forward, his hand came out and he took Bruce's own. He held on tight, his eyes locking with Bruce's. He closed the gap. His forehead now pressed against Clark's. ~~'Come, my love, let me awaken what most think dead.'~~

Pain, white and hot lanced through Clark's skull. He opened his mouth to scream, but only bubbles escaped. He remembered. He remembered it all. All the nights in the water, all those times he spent

with Bruce by the lake, the first time they played together, the first time he had met his mother. It was all there, back and fresh in his mind.

The last memory caused him to crumple, he could see it all clearly. The memory was no longer obscured by time and his inability to process. He could see her clearly before him, her sharp teeth baring down on him, those twitching sacks on her side.

He needed to get away, needed to escape. So he swam, and swam and continued until he couldn’t anymore.

He doesn’t know where he ended up. He simply moved until he felt the sun on his skin. He breathed in deep and despite how the memories pulsed in his mind, he lowered his face down into the sand, and slept.

Chapter End Notes

And there it is! The chapter I have been working on for well over a year now. To see it finished is just so satisfying. I also hope this chapter has answered a few questions people might have had about Bruce and Clark's past.

As always, let me know your thoughts! I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Take care and I will see you all next time! :D

Chapter 50

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

9th of December 2016

At the present moment, all Clark could glean was that he was inside.

Where exactly, he couldn't parse just yet. He knew he was in a bed as he could feel the soft linen underneath him. He also knew he was near a kitchen as he could smell the aroma of spices that had ingrained themselves into the wooden counters as well as, yes, something cooking on the stove top. The issue was he couldn't recognize any of it. It felt familiar in a way that a warm bed and home might, but alien in the fact he couldn't recognize the hallmarks that told him that it was his home he was residing in.

'Mama, when's he going to wake up?'

'Leave him be for now, *mija*. He'll wake up when he's ready to.'

Ah, there were the voices as well. They were soothing so he didn't feel the need to rocket awake when he first heard them, but again, they were not ones he recognized. He'd heard them a few times now, voicing something similar to what had just been said and then they'd lapse into comfortable silence once more.

On this occasion however, there was something new. There was movement, and he felt the bed dip as though someone was climbing onto it. He then felt something cold and wet touch his hand and couldn't help but twitch at the contact. At the movement, he heard a quiet gasp.

'Mama he's waking up! He twitched!'

'I told you to leave him be.' Came the beleaguered response. He heard footsteps approaching now. A hand then came to rest against his forehead, and as Clark felt those fingers brush his hair aside, he let out a breath he hadn't realized he had been holding. There was something about the gesture that

caused his mind to swell with thoughts of Smallville, of pretending to be sick to get out of going to school and of his mother humouring him by feeling for a temperature that they both knew wasn't there.

Slowly, he opened his eyes and almost immediately was confronted with a young girl looming over him. She grinned down at him. 'I told you he was waking up! Look at how blue his eyes are, Mama!'

'Yes yes, Sofia, you were right, now get out of his face. He doesn't need you crowding him.' Came another voice, Clark craned his neck to find its source and saw a man approaching. He was short in stature, with a balding head and wearing a pair of glasses that looked as though they had seen better days. He paused beside the woman who's hand still rested on his head and looked down at him. 'How are you feeling, son?'

Clark tried to speak, but found his voice was non-existent. He cleared his throat, and when that didn't work and all that came out was a groan, the woman rushed away before returning with a water filled glass. 'Here, drink this.'

Clark did just that, and after a few hasty swallows he cleared his throat. "Thank you." He rasped out.

"Do you prefer speaking?" The man asked, his expression soft.

Clark frowned at the question. He tried to understand the words, but found he simply couldn't. "What?"

The man however, didn't look fussed by Clark's blunt question and simply clasped his hands together and approached in the same calm manner the woman had. "Some mernans do, others prefer to sync, I'm asking which you prefer."

'Say syncing, my mouth speak isn't that good.' Came the voice of the little girl beside him. Clark took in her appearance then. She looked a lot like the woman, with the same tight brown curls all over her head. Her skin however was a pale olive like the man's was. It was as he noticed this that the most striking part of her appearance made itself known, however; a dark blue tail flicked at her side.

"Hush Sofia, he's still getting his bearings."

“Buh mam, oo no es bas!” Came the girl's voice, nothing like the sweet sounding one Clark had heard only moments ago. This one was brusque and malformed. Most likely due to the sharp teeth that filled her mouth. Clark frown only deepened, and the woman shook her head towards the girl.

“*You* don’t need to speak!”

‘But I don't wanna be left out…’ the girl pouted.

“Forgive our daughter, she always gets like this when kin wash up.” The man said, approaching the bed and sitting down at the stool beside it. “You must have questions, so please, ask away.”

Where would he even begin? The mer girl on his bed, the fact he was apparently syncing or that he was being tended to in a stranger's home and it wasn’t being treated as a freak occurrence.

The last query he found was the one that was most pressing. “Where am I exactly?” Clark asked.

“You're in Paraíso, on Nero specifically. You washed up here earlier this morning. No one else was with you, but they could have washed up on one of the other islands. Were you traveling with anyone else?”

Clark had hoped the question would clear some of the malaise that seemed to be fogging his mind, but if anything it only strengthened it and he felt his stomach wriggling uncomfortably. “I'm in Paraíso?”

‘Yeah! You made it!’ The little girl said, slapping her hands on the blanket over Clark’s thighs. ‘You're gonna love it here! The fish here taste so--’

‘Sofia please…’

‘But Papa…’

The man shook his head toward the girl and continued. “To answer your question, yes, you’re in Paraíso. On one of the inner islands, Nero. Most people wash up on the outer islands, but Gran Madre

must have caught your boat later than most.”

‘Yeah, we never get newbies.’ The girl said with a crisp nod, her excitement palpable.

“Now I'll ask you again, were you traveling with anyone else?”

Clark shook his head. “No, I was, wait--” Clark turned to the water. His mind flooded with what had occurred in the water, or more importantly, *who* he had left in it. “Bruce.”

“It’s okay, don’t panic.” Clark didn’t even realize how hard of a grip he had on the blanket until he felt the man's warm hand rest on top of his. “If he’s also a mernan, Gran Madre would have let him through, I'll send my daughters to ask around and see if he is on one of the other islands.”

“No, you don’t understand, Bruce isn’t a merman, he’s a mer, and I left him in the water.” The words rushed out of him and only once he had finished did he wince at their implication. He hadn’t so much as left him in the water but at the bottom of the ocean. Alone.

“Oh, well if he's a mer he’ll have no problem getting through.” The man said, his voice suddenly chipper. “He’s most likely with the other mers at the Oasis.”

“I doubt that.” Clark muttered before taking another sip of water.

Despite his grumbling the man seemed to be in far better spirits than moments ago and offered his hand to Clark. “I should introduce myself properly, my name is Hugo, this is my wife Esme.” He gestured to the woman beside him who offered him a shy smile. “You’ve already met Sophia.” The small mer grinned up at him, her teeth gleaming. “Our other daughters CeCe and Luisa are out at the moment. What is your name?”

Clark took a moment to respond, occupied as he was with trying to make sense of the situation he found himself in. “Clark.” He offered after a moment.

“Well, nice to meet you, Clark. Esme has just finished lunch and once we’ve eaten and you're able to move, I'll take you over to Great Paraíso and we can figure out where you’ll be living from now on.”

Clark however set his glass down and stood, on albeit slightly shaky legs. “It's kind of you to offer, but I don’t exactly plan on staying long.”

At his words, Hugo's kind exterior cracked revealing fear. “You… you don’t know?” He asked cautiously, eyeing Esme who stepped back. Even Sophia seemed to retreat across the mattress.

“Know what?” Clark asked.

“You… can’t *leave* Paraíso.” Hugo practically whispered, stepping back himself.

Clark frowned, before Jaime’s words came back to him. *‘She doesn’t like mernans leaving though, so just like she breaks boats that get too near, she does the same with anyone who tries to leave.’*

Mistaking his silence, Hugo raised his hands in a pacifying manner. “Please don’t be upset, your life here will be just as good as the one you had out there, I promise you.”

“Gran Madre takes care of us all, and keeps us safe. You will never need to worry again.” Esme said, her smile strained.

Clark however, only cocked his head, his concern mounting due to the display before him. “Do people usually take the whole ‘unable to leave’ news that badly?”

At the question, Hugo faltered, his confusion evident. “You’re not mad?”

Clark shrugged. “Not really.”

Hugo let out a sigh so profound he practically folded. “Oh, well, that's a relief. The previous mernan that washed along our shore didn’t like the fact he couldn’t return to the mainlands. Made sure to let me know that personally...” He muttered the last part as he absent mindedly rested his hand on top of the long scar along his elbow.

“Some people know what the arrangement is before coming to the islands, others don’t. We’ve had mernans who didn’t even know they had mer blood wash up and cause mayhem because they wanted

to leave and couldn’t.”

“I take it Gran Madre deals with them?” Clark asked.

“She makes it very clear what happens to people who try to leave.” Hugo said. “Besides, there is no point; we have food, shelter and a community unlike anything outside of these waters. People who don't realize that don’t deserve to stay here and enjoy it." Hugo clasped his hands together. “Now, let's eat and I'll take you to Great Paraíso.”

“Again, it's kind of you to offer, but I'm not staying.”

Hugo's confused frown returned only this time was accompanied with a portion of exasperation. “But I just told you--”

“Yeah, she breaks boats, I don't plan on leaving via boat.”

Hugo however only waved his hand. “Don't even think about it. If you try to swim, Gran Madre *will* catch you. Believe me, I've seen many people try. They think she won’t notice them in the water if they're not in a boat, they think she’ll be slow as she’s so big, but she *will* notice you and she *will* catch up to you and when she does, let's say it will not be pleasant.”

Clark however wasn’t phased. “I wasn’t going to swim, either.”

Hugo faltered and in the silence, Esme cocked her head, her face equally awash with confusion. “Then how exactly were you planning on leaving?”

Clark opened his mouth to reply before the small part of his brain that was in charge of keeping his identity a secret reared its head. Of course, Clark hadn’t listened to that part of himself for a while and wasn’t about to change that now. As such he said, “I figured I'd fly. It's worked for me in the past, plus I assume Gran Madre can’t get me if I'm up in the air.”

In the absolute silence, Clark could hear the lapping along the beach outside. Eventually Sofia turned her frown towards her parents. ‘Can mernans fly now?’

“I’m not a mernan either, I have no mer blood.” Clark said simply.

Hugo threw his arms down at this, rolling his eyes. “Okay, now I know you're messing with us.” He shook his head. “I don't know where you're from but it's not nice to joke about this sort of thing.”

“No joking.” Clark said, and to illustrate his point, he lifted his legs up, folding them underneath him as he floated in the air. “I'm an alien.”

The silence returned only this time it looked as though Hugo was going to pass out, his face having gone a deadly shade of pale. He sat down and Esme rushed to his side, her hands on his shoulders as she watched Clark float across the room. “How are you doing that?” She whispered.

Clark set his feet back down. “Told you. I'm an alien.”

“An alien." Hugo repeated, his eyes unfocused as he stared into the air in front of him. “Now I've seen it all.”

Esme pressed her lips together. “I just don't understand how you can sync if you aren't a mernan.”

Clark exhaled sharply and bobbed his head. “Yeah, that’s thanks to my partner, Bruce. He’s the one who activated my sync.”

“Right.” Hugo said, his stare now focused on him. “And for him to have been able to do that, you would have needed mer blood.”

Clark shook his head. “He’s an abyssal fin. Apparently he’s the only kind of mer who can do that kind of thing, I don’t know the exact details of *how* he did it, but he managed it somehow.”

Hugo’s mouth fell open, as did Esme’s, only Sofia seemed ambivalent to the information and looked up at Clark with quiet curiosity. ‘He’s like Gran Madre?’ She asked.

“Yeah.” Clark nodded. “He’s a brood mother too, though he’s not gotten big… yet.” He trailed off. Really, he was going to have to talk to Bruce about all that at some point. It wasn’t that he was put off by the idea, per say, but the logistics of how it was all going to work when it happened were something he was still grappling with.

Mostly the whole sack thing. He *really* needed to talk to Bruce about the sacks.

He shuddered at the memory and offered a smile to Sofia. “Have you met Gran Madre before?” he asked, attempting to get his mind away from flesh sacks and onto something more pleasant.

‘Yeah, she lets us ride on her back sometimes when she swims around the islands!’

“She sounds nice.” Clark said, ‘aside from the whole eating people who aren't mers thing,’ he added internally.

Sofia giggled and covered her mouth. ‘I heard that!’

“You--” Clark balked before turning to Esme and Hugo. “Wait… Did you hear that too?”

Hugo pressed his lips together, a look of commiseration on his face. ‘Afraid so, the down side of the sync is that thoughts aren't as private as they used to be.’

“Oh no.” Clark muttered. Despite knowing a mind reader, having just about everyone in his inner circle be able to now hear his thoughts was something he didn’t think he was ever going to be okay with. Selina, Slade, even *Jason* would be able to hear him. He shuddered again. ‘Maybe I should just live here instead…’

“We’d welcome you with open arms if you did.” Hugo said brightly.

“*Damn it* .” Clark whispered, grabbing his head. “How do I turn it off?”

“You can't,” Esme said with a slight laugh. “Oh, I forgot how fun this part was.”

“Making fun of someone else's misery doesn't seem very welcoming.” Clark grumbled. “I'm not used to my mind being out on display.”

“It’s just part of being a mer. We are open amongst our kin, especially our pod mates.”

“It’s just that *my* pod is very complicated.” Clark grumbled. “I don't need some of them in my mind… and I definitely don't want to be in theirs.”

“That will change, you just need to get used to it.” Hugo stood up. “Now, before my stomach eats itself. Lunch!”

They found their way to the round dining table, there were five seats around it and after the rest of the family sat, Clark set his hand down on the top of one of the chairs that were empty. “Are you other daughters joining us or?”

“No no. CeCe and Luisa hunt for themselves, Sofia is still young so eats with us.”

Sofia nodded sagely. ‘I'm too small to hunt.’

“More like too lazy." Hugo said with a smile as he set a whole fish on her plate. Almost immediately she reached for it and brought it to her lips, cracking her teeth down on its skull and sucking the innards out. “Forgive her table manners, she's not used to eating around others.”

Clark however only smiled. A feeling of warmth filling him. “Don’t worry, Bruce is just as bad.”

“Right, the abyssal fin...” Hugo said as he began dishing out their lunch. It was a fish stew that thankfully hadn't gotten too cold during their conversations. Clark felt his stomach growl as he waited for Hugo to finish serving. Once he had, he took a bite and let out a quiet hum of appreciation. ‘It’s been a while since I've had something like this.’

“I hope that means you like it.” Esme replied playfully. Digging into her own bowl.

“Oh, yeah.” Clark let out, his cheeks growing pink. “Sorry, it tastes amazing.”

“Don't be sorry, we’re just teasing.” Hugo smiled. “Also, if you don't mind, I was actually meaning to ask you something, about your partner.”

“Yeah?”

“How did you two get separated, exactly? Usually when mers and mernans come here they tend to stick together.”

Clark grew silent.

“You don't have to--”

“No, no. It's just well, he activated my sync, and I maybe, sort of… left him at the bottom of the ocean.”

The room went quiet as they looked at him. Even Sofia took a break from gnawing to regard him, though she quickly went back to her fish once a sufficient amount of staring had occurred.

“I freaked out,” Clark continued. “It wasn’t what I was expecting and I needed to get out of the water as soon as possible so I swam away and I guess this is where I ended up.”

Hugo hummed. “Well, if he's all the way at the bottom of the ocean it’s going to take him a while to get back up here. When CeCe and Luisa go deep it can take them hours to get back to the surface. You could explore the island in the meantime.”

“Yeah…” Clark said to himself. He wondered if Bruce was going to get more or less mad on his journey up to the surface. Probably more as he likely had little to do other than to think as he drifted up. Maybe he should go check up on him? Maybe even pick him up a steak or two.

‘I don't think that's a good idea, *cariño* . If others saw Clark and then he were to leave the islands… what would they think?’

Hugo grew quiet. ‘I didn't think about that…’

“I don't mind people knowing I'm an alien.” Clark said as he took another bite of stew.

“It's not that.” Hugo muttered. “Not everyone is as happy in Paraíso as we are. Some wish to leave, and resent not being able to.”

Clark shrugged a shoulder. “I mean, I can't exactly blame them; a golden cage is still a cage, no matter how nice it is.”

Hugo however shook his head. “Not to me. Not to a lot of us. When me and Esme lived on Puerto Vallarta we had to be so careful with CeCe and Luisa, had to keep them locked in the house, have them sleep in the bathtub and only take them out to swim in the dead of night. I didn’t want that life for my daughters, and so when I heard whispers about Paraíso, I realized I didn't care what it was going to be like for me so long as it truly was a place where my daughters could be free. And it is, mers of all kinds swim in these waters, they are free, happy, and the fact I cannot return to the mainlands has not bothered me in the slightest.”

“But it bothers others?”

“Yes.” Esme said her eyes downcast. “It can cause friction sometimes, some have…” she looked to Sofia who was now playing with the fish bones on her plate, Esme reached for her hand and took it in her own. “Why don't you go out for a swim, *mija* .”

Sofia nodded and slid from the table. ‘Thanks for the food!’

Once she was out of the door, Esme turned to Clark, her voice low. “Some have even voiced their desire to try and get rid of Gran Madre.”

“Forgetting that she is the one keeping us all safe.” Hugo grit his teeth. “*Pendejos.* ”

“Their reasoning is that we would function better if we were able to go to the mainlands, but there is just no need. We grow and hunt for what we need and everything else comes from the ships and

freighters Madre sinks."

"It sounds like it's a control issue." Clark voiced. "People rarely like to be in a situation they have little control over. Whoever is voicing this most likely wants to be in control of the islands themselves. Or at least not have their free will taken from them."

"Precisely." Hugo said, pointing his spoon at Clark. "They cannot see beyond their own selfish desires. They do not understand the risk Paraíso would be under if people could come and go, if *anyone* were able to come and go."

"So it's best they don't find out about me, huh?"

Hugo huffed a laugh at that. "Yes, that would be for the best."

Clark should have known the moment the words left his lips that whatever God was watching over them had heard him and decided to show they had a sense of humour.

Sofia burst through the door, and was quickly followed by three other mers.

The two girls looked like Sofia, with one sharing her brown curls and the other her olive skin. The male however, looked incredibly familiar for an entirely different reason.

"*Jaime* ?"

"It is you!" Jaime said brightly, wiggling his way past the three other mers towards Clark. "When Sofia said she had an alien in her house I figured it must have been you!"

"You know him, Jaime?" Hugo asked, his brows furrowed.

Clark however didn't have time to respond as Jaime spoke "He's the one who saved me, Hugo! He's Superman!"

Hugo and Esme both dropped their spoons at precisely the same moment and Clark tried to give his best apologetic smile at their twin expressions. “Sorry, did I not mention that? Must have slipped my mind…”

Jaime however kept going. “Anyway, what are you doing here? Have you come to see the place? I could give you a tour!”

“*Jaime*.” Esme interjected, having recovered from her shock. “We think it's best that Clark's presence remains a secret. We don’t want people knowing there is a mernan who can *leave* the island.”

Jaime however didn't seem to take the words at face value and took them to mean only one thing. “I knew you felt different!” Jaime said, before he grinned. ‘You can hear us now, right?’

Clark pressed his lips together. ‘Yup, still getting used to it though.’

“That’s amazing!” Jaime beamed. “Did you come here to try it out?”

“Uh, more like I left Bruce at the bottom of the ocean after it was activated and passed out on the beach not long after.”

“Oh.” Jaime let out before, his demeanour turned jovial once more. “Still, it’s so cool that you’re here!”

Hugo turned to the three girls by the door. His eyes narrowed. ‘Sofia, how many others have you told about our ‘guest?’’

‘Just CeCe, Luisa and Jaime.’ At his continued staring she pouted ‘I promise! Tell him CeCe!’

The mer with short curls nodded. “It’s true, dad.”

“Yeah, it was just us. Sorry, I was nearby and overheard.” Jaime said, offering a sheepish grin.

“Okay, well as we already said, we don’t want people to know about Clark being here. He doesn’t plan on staying and if others find out it would be bad for the islands.”

“We understand, dad.” CeCe said, bumping her shoulder against the other mer.

‘Yup, keep the alien under wraps.’ Luisa nodded.

“Great, well with that settled, what are you planning to do next Clark?”

He thought for a moment. He hadn’t really considered doing anything aside from going back down into the water to check on Bruce and temper whatever anger he was feeling before he got to the surface. But all this talk of dissent and mers got him thinking. “You think I could go speak to Gran Madre?”

The mers nearby didn’t look fussed by the question but Esme and Hugo did, their face’s turning grave. “She doesn’t speak to mernans.”

“I think she’ll make an exception for me.” Clark said. “She can't exactly eat me if she gets annoyed”

That at least did something to ease Esme’s mind if her gentle smile was anything to go by. “What are you going to speak to her about?”

“Don't really know yet. I just find this whole place interesting, and as I can't talk to its people without causing problems, I figured I'd talk to her instead.”

“I see.” Hugo said. “The girls and Jaime would be able to take you to her, but again, try to keep out a view of the other mers…”

“Madre is deep underwater right now. Out in the gulf, if we swim low the other mers won't notice us.” Jaime said with a grin.

“Have you spoken to Gran Madre a lot, Jaime?”

“Just a few times, when I came back from Cottonwood after the whole Hadal thing, she asked me if I was okay as she hadn’t sensed me in a while. She may seem scary but she’s a softie at heart.”

“I see.” Clark said. That eased his mind more than he realized. Given his last experience with a broodmother ended with him being scared for life, this already sounded like it was going to go better. “Well, I better be off. Thank you for looking after me.”

“Anytime. Should you wish to visit Paraíso again, please know our doors are open to you.”

Clark left then, led by the small group of mers out onto the beach and quickly into the water. Though there were no others around, he couldn't exactly blame the need for secrecy. He was just hoping his conversation with Gran Madre would be as illuminating as he hoped.

Chapter End Notes

I know I said I was gonna do a load of writing over the Summer but then I got an abscess, had to put my cat down and just lost all motivation to write in general so I guess that shows why I should never make promises like that 🙃

Anyway, here is the next chapter. Clark is on Paraiso, and Bruce is still in the water somewhere, most likely mad.

Hope you all enjoyed and I will catch you all next time. Take care x

Chapter 51

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As they dove deep under the water, it didn't take long for the tropical blue waters around them to turn cold and dark. Once they had, Clark marvelled at the sight that lay before him. Spread out across the seabed were wreckages of all shapes and sizes. Some looked to be so old that even a gentle touch would crumble them, whilst others seemed as though they could have been above the waves not too long ago. The density was such that some had even landed on top of one another, creating towers of metal and rust. The mers lead him through the graveyard of ships, going deeper still, until eventually, even the fleeting amount of sunlight that was still with them, left.

Not too long after, Sofia and Luisa stopped in the water. Clark swam up beside them, his head quirked in silent question. 'Sofia can't go any further,' Luisa said in response. 'I'm going to take her back up. The others will take you to Madre.'

'I can't handle the deep water yet.' Sofia said, a small pout on her face.

'Thanks for coming this far.' Clark thought back. Though he was still getting used to the sync, he couldn't deny that being able to speak as easily underwater as on land was definitely a plus regardless of all the negatives that came along with it. 'You two take care.'

Luisa nodded and scooped Sofia in her arms before quickly swimming up the water column. Clark turned and found Jaime and CeCe waiting for him up ahead. Once he had re-joined them, they kept moving forward.

The slope of the seabed was subtle, but it was there. It didn't feel as though they were getting any deeper as they moved along, but the familiar pressure along his skin told Clark that they very much were.

Just before him, he watched as CeCe and Jaime's tails moved in tandem, until they suddenly stopped.

Clark pulled up beside them and knew immediately why they had stopped moving. They had reached the edge of the shelf, and before them was a vast, inky black expanse of water that dropped down into apparent nothingness. When he looked down over the edge, he could barely see the sea bed below. A

feeling of deja vu washed over him at the sight. He could so easily see himself stepping off the shelf and falling deeper still, just as he had done countless times as a child. He could see Bruce and the brine pool so clearly in his mind it was as though he were there now.

The lingering tendrils of fear were still there, sure, but whatever Bruce had done to him had finally allowed Clark to process his memories of that time. No more did the mere idea of going deep into the water fill him with dread, instead he was able to remember the joy it used to bring him, how much he had craved it growing up. The shadow of Bruce's mother still lingered in his mind, but no longer did the half formed memory of her taint his memory of the water.

It was only as he felt himself drift closer towards the edge, towards those pleasant memories, that he was reminded he wasn't alone.

'Gran Madre is near.' Jaime said, pulling him back to the present.

Clark tore his stare away from abyss and looked out across the space before them. In the far distance he saw movement, so fleeting he thought it might have just been the water playing tricks on him. As he focused he saw it. A whale? No, a whale didn't move like that. 'I think I see her.' Clark said, pointing ahead.

Jaime turned his head and followed his finger. Upon spotting what Clark had, he let out a hum. 'Good eye, let's go.'

Clark swam over the shelf, and for a moment, it felt as though it were pulling him downwards. The urge was there to let it, to fall down into the depths as he wanted to but he had to remind himself that wasn't what he was here for. He instead kicked his feet and swam forward after Jaime and CeCe.

As they swam, he couldn't help but voice, 'not that I mind the company, but you two didn't need to come with me.'

CeCe huffed. 'You say Gran Madre can't eat you but I'm worried she might try.'

'Yeah, we're just here to ease the idea of an alien to her gently.' Jaime said with an easy smile.

Clark frowned. He doubted that was something that *anyone* could phrase gently, but he wasn't about to argue with the teens.

As they drew near, more of Gran Madre came into view and he felt his insides run cold. He had hoped his new found clarity of the past would have made looking at the sight before him any easier, but no, the mer before him still had his heart hammering, his mind running frantic. He reminded himself not to breathe in, despite how much his lungs began to ache. 'It's not her… it's not her…'

'What was that?' Jaime asked, turning a confused frown his way.

Clark ignored him, his attention focused solely on the mer before him. Jaime was right, she was larger than a whale, larger than Bruce's mother, larger than any creature Clark had ever seen either on this planet or off of it. As he drew even closer he swallowed thickly. Despite what he had been hoping, she looked nearly identical to what he remembered of Bruce's mother.

They had the same plate like scales covering their bodies, the same black orbs for eyes, the same spindly teeth. There was one major difference Clark could glean, however. She was thinner than what he remembered of Bruce's mother, with the sacks along her flanks appearing to have atrophied into almost nothing. There was also something in the way she moved that told Clark from sight alone that this mer was far older than he could fathom.

'Hello children,' came the rasping voice within his head. It wasn't what Clark was expecting, and if he closed his eyes he could even imagine it being the voice of any normal grandmother, albeit one who smoked a pack of cigarettes a day. He was just thankful it wasn't as terrifying as the last brood mother's voice he had heard; the lack of static-filled interference most likely had something to do with it. 'I see you have brought a guest with you.'

As her large eyes slid onto him, Clark let himself feel relieved that she at least she didn't seem angry to see him, that already put this interaction leagues ahead of the last. He also hoped that lowered the chances of him getting eaten. 'He's a friend of ours, Gran Madre. His name is Clark; he's the one who saved me from that doctor.'

Something close to surprise touched Gran Madre's face and she tilted her head. 'This is the man? I expected him to be bigger.'

Clark looked up at her face and tried to smile though the effect was lost due to the grimace he was fighting back. 'I mean, I am pretty tall, you're just… very big.'

He didn’t know what he expected but the raspy laugh was not it. ‘I am indeed, child. Yet, despite your size, I hear you have other attributes of note.’

Clark turned to Jaime, raising a brow. ‘Have you been telling *everyone* I'm Superman?’

‘Not… *everyone*.’ Jaime said sheepishly, looking away.

CeCe caught his stare, and that look alone told Clark the truth.

He rolled his eyes as he turned his attention back to the large mer before him. ‘Yes, I can do other things. Can't do many of them right now, but--’

‘But you are here with me, where other mernans would be crushed. You are able to sync with us, despite not having our blood. Perhaps there is hope for my bloodline after all...’

Despite all attempts to keep his mind blank, the implication of those words caused his mind to flood in terror. His eyes flicked to her sides, where the flaccid sacs laid.

Another raspy laugh. ‘Do not fret child, I am long past my birthing years, the last clutch I laid was over a thousand years before you were even born.’

‘A… *thousand* years?’ Clark balked.

‘Yes, a clutch of four I laid. All are now dead. I had hoped to join them, but despite my years, the void has not yet called to me, and so here I am, alive, whilst the rest of my kin are long gone.’

‘Not long gone.’ Clark said, softly. What he was hearing was not unlike things he had felt himself in the past. Before Kara and Kon had come into his life, the idea that he was the last of his kind often weighed heavy on him. It was a feeling that not many people would ever have to experience, and he was thankful that he no longer had to. ‘My partner, Bruce, he’s an abyssal fin.'

Gran Madre smiled. ‘So I have heard. I am glad at least one of my kin survived the last quake. Did he mention the trench he was from?’

Clark paused for a moment, wracking his mind. He tried to think if Bruce or anyone had mentioned the name of a trench over the months and as he thought, his mind went to Slade, to the conversation they had once he realized Clark wasn't a mer hunter holding one captive. ‘I think it was called… Gotham?’

The mer before him grew silent. ‘Gotham?’

Clark relayed the memory once more and gave an affirmative bob of the head.

A slow nod was Madre’s response. ‘I see,’ she hummed, the vibrations of which hit Clark’s body with more intensity than he was expecting. ‘I would like to meet your partner… if he would agree to it.’

‘I can’t see why he wouldn’t, I don't think he knew there were any other abyssal fins around.’

‘Nor did I, but I am happy to hear I was wrong.’ Madre said, though the gentle smile on her face quickly left as she turned her attention upward. ‘Follow, I must go up.’

‘A ship?’ Clark ventured.

‘Yes.’

Clark made a face. Hearing tales of Madre’s sinking's were one thing, but he doubted he could remain as ambivalent should he see bodies entering the water.

‘If they do not venture close, you need not worry.’ Came Madre’s soft rasp.

Clark felt his cheeks heat up at being caught. ‘Sorry, I didn’t mean--’

‘I do not go out of my way to harm humans, but I will do what I must to keep my pod safe. I have seen first hand what humans are capable of.’

‘No offense to your kind, but I've also seen what mers can do.’

‘It's an age-old battle. Mers and humans.’ Madre replied easily. ‘And yet, it had all started so promisingly.’

‘What do you mean by that, Madre?’ CeCe asked, before looking at Clark sheepishly. ‘Sorry, I've just never heard about any of this stuff before.’

‘It is natural for you pups to be curious, the world is far older than you have any way to grasp, even I am an infant when compared to it.’

‘Yet I get the feeling you know more than most.’ Clark said.

‘Most are uninterested in the past, focused as they are on the future.’

‘I'm interested.’ Clark said, not missing the eager nods from Jaime and CeCe.

‘So ask what you wish to know of me.’

Clark paused in thought. ‘Well, first off, how did you end up here all alone?’

‘Once my daughter came of age, I no longer had a home to call my own so I circled the planet waiting for the void to call, but it never did. I started to venture closer to the surface than I had done in millennia out of desperation until one day I ended up crashing against a ship, everyone fell into the water as the wood cracked apart and the few mernans amongst the crew crawled onto my back whilst the humans drowned. I swam with them until I came across these very islands. They made them their new home and before long, mers became curious of the island's new inhabitants and Paraiso was born.’

‘Why did you have to leave your pod in the first place?’ CeCe asked, swimming up closer to Madre’s face.

‘An abyssal pod is very different from the pods you know, pup. Within an abyssal pod, the brood mother leads. She is mother to all, the one who all others defer to. Had I stayed, there would have been some within the pod that would have continued to follow me, even when I inevitably stopped baring children and my daughter started to. The pod would have become fractured, so for the sake of it remaining whole, I needed to leave. So I did.’

‘That must have been hard…’ CeCe murmured.

‘Oh, it was, but the needs of the pod are always more important than any one person.’ Madre paused then, her eyes trained up at the bottom of the ship. So far, it had remained on its course, with no sudden turns towards the islands, though Clark couldn’t help but wince at how close they were getting. Madre hummed in agreement. ‘Humans have learned not to come near these waters, though some do like to take their chances.’ She closed her eyes as though deep in thought. ‘Pups, return to the islands.’

CeCe and Jaime frowned. ‘But Madre--’ they said simultaneously.

‘I promise I will answer all your curiosities another time, but right now, I wish to speak to Clark alone.’

The two looked forlornly at the Madre, lingering for a moment as though waiting for her to change her mind. When that didn’t happen, they huffed, then swam upwards with only faint grumbles. Once they were alone, Madre turned those dark eyes to Clark and tried for a smile. Batting her tail once, she glided through the water and Clark found himself kicking his legs quickly to try and keep up. The ship above had veered off towards the mainland, leaving them be. ‘Now, Clark.’ Madre said. ‘Why don’t you ask me what you really want to know?

Clark frowned, ‘what I really want to know?’ He repeated, and almost without thinking, his eyes flicked to her flank.

Madre hummed a laugh. ‘They really do fascinate you, don’t they?’

Clark grimaced. ‘That’s one word for it, sure.’

‘You’re worried, about what this means for you and ‘*Bruce* .’’

‘I mean, yeah,’ Clark said, looking away. ‘I don’t know about anyone else, but *I* personally don’t want to be in a sack.’

‘And you won’t.’ Madre said easily. ‘You’ve already impregnated him, haven't you? Clearly you are resistant to our enzymes.’

‘Enzymes?’ Clark asked, before a conversation with Slade came back to him.

“I got Blackfin blood, remember. Means my skin is resistant to the enzyme in his slick.”

Madre hummed. ‘Yes, Abyssal fins excrete an enzyme that melts others upon prolonged contact. A brood mothers skin becomes even more caustic as they transition. If you haven't been permanently injured by the enzyme yet, it is unlikely it’s going to happen now.’

‘Right…’ Clark said more to himself as he remembered the rest of what Slade had said.

“The fact it burns you is somewhat worrying. I guess it’s because Bruce is transitioning to a brood mother. If that's the case his slick’s only gonna get more acidic, you know.”

‘So that’s going to happen to Bruce?’ Clark began, his mind reeling from the implication of those words. ‘He's gonna melt any mer he comes into contact with?’

Another hum, though there was a softness behind this one that Clark realized must have been an attempt at comfort. Another bat of the tail as she swam even further away from the ship above. ‘That scares you.’

‘Obviously.’ Clark snapped. ‘It’s one thing to say he’s going to get big, it's another thing entirely to say mers are going to get *stuck* on him.’

‘Well, I can't comprehend how you are able to venture into the stars, or how despite not being one of us you can dive down into the ocean’s depths. You are as much of an anomaly as I am.’ She murmured with a shake of her head. ‘You simply don’t look like one.’

Clark pressed his lips together as a wave of guilt washed over him. He thought back to Bruce, pleading with him to understand, to see things from his perspective. His mother wasn’t a monster and he wasn’t a freak. But Clark didn’t listen; he was repulsed by what he had seen and didn’t even allow Bruce a moment to try to explain it. He was young, scared and most of all, didn’t have the perspective he had now. He and Bruce really weren't that different. The only difference was that he *looked* human, had that not been the case, his life would have been drastically different and he knew it. Would Ma and Pa have even taken him in? Or would they have left him alone in disgust like he had done to Bruce?

He shuddered. He didn’t even want to think about that.

‘I wish I could just accept all of this but I can’t help but find it… Terrifying.’

‘And that’s normal.’ Madre said softly. ‘Fear of the unknown is always to be expected. Our kind is an unknown even to other mers; relegated to legend at best and an omen of death at worst. At least you wish to learn and move past your fear.’

Clark hummed in agreement. ‘I want to be there for Bruce. For our children. I know I just need to get over myself, and I know that’s going to take time, but this is definitely helping.’ He turned and appraised Madre. ‘You’re very easy to talk to, even with the whole ‘able to eat me whole’ thing you have going on.’

Madre laughed at that. ‘I’m glad to hear that.’

They swam back towards the islands and when they reached the shelf, Madre perched along the edge, resting her upper body along the sand. She let out a little hum as she stretched and rested her head onto her hands. Clark swam near to her, settling down on the sand with crossed legs. He looked up and if he strained he could see the glimmering of sunlight from above. ‘Going back to the sacks…’ Clark began.

‘Hmm?’ Madre hummed. Clark didn’t miss the amused tone in her voice.

‘Why do you have them in the first place? Bruce gave birth normally, so, why are the sacks even a thing?’

‘Bruce is still your size, correct?’

‘Yes.’

‘When he reaches my size, that form of reproduction will become impossible for him.’ Madre’s eyes opened and peered down at him. ‘That is when his true reproductive cycle begins, males will be drawn in by his pheromones and be unable to control themselves in turn. They’ll wish to consume him, carnally, and upon contact, they’ll fuse onto his body and become *part* of him. Once their brain function ceases, he will be able to use them for breeding and then his life as a true brood mother will begin.’

Clark grimaced. ‘But that’s not going to happen till he’s your size, right?’

Madre smiled. ‘Yes, you needn’t worry. It won’t happen any time soon.’

‘How long will it take?’ Clark asked. ‘You know, till he is really big.’

‘Some brood mothers take several millennia to get to my size, others can do it in just over a hundred years. Each mother is different.’

Clark paused, his brows furrowing together. He must have misheard her. ‘Pardon?’

Madre brought her hand up, resting her chin on it as she looked down at Clark. ‘That surprises you?’

‘I mean…’ Clark faltered. He knew Bruce was a brood mother, knew he was going to get big, he also knew the mer before him predated the Aztec empire, yet for some reason, his mind just hadn’t put two and two together on what exactly that meant yet. Then, the weight of Madre's words from earlier hit him. ‘So does that mean he’s going to outlive everyone?’ He looked down at himself. ‘Out live *me* ?’

Madre hummed. ‘It’s a lonely life.’

Clark grew quiet. He pondered those words and tried to come to terms with what they meant. He didn't know how many years he had; there weren't exactly any yellow sun raised Kyrptonian's he could ask about the matter. He had assumed it was similar to a human, but if that were the case, he'd be dead long before Bruce. Everyone would be dead long before Bruce. He would be all alone like Madre, waiting for a death that never came. The idea caused his stomach to ache and he closed his eyes with a grimace.

'There is no point worrying.' Came Madre's soothing voice. 'Death comes for us all eventually. Some sooner than others.'

'You're still here.' Clark said warily.

Madre offered a sad smile. 'My time will come, some day.'

Clark looked away, shaking his head. 'I'm sorry, I must sound like a dick. It's just a lot to process.'

'I understand.'

And so they sat in silence. Clark eventually lay down flat along the sand, his hands digging into it and feeling the coarse grains along his palms. He watched as the faint dot above him that was the sun slowly moved. Madre didn't speak, though she let out an occasional rumble, one that Clark realized was done to scare any errant sharks that came too close. He knew he should return to the surface, perhaps even go back to Slade and Selina and wait for Bruce with them. But he didn't. He remained where he was.

'Did you ever try and go back to your pod? See how they were doing?'

'I wanted to, but no, I never did.'

'Why?'

'It took all I had to leave the first time, I feared if I returned I wouldn't be able to do it again. Besides, I believe they all thought me dead. It's not a common thing for a podless brood mother to live as long

as I have.’

Clark hummed. ‘You must have seen a lot over the years.'

‘I have, which is why I will continue to protect these islands till I do eventually pass. Not just from outside, but from within.’

‘So you know about the mernans wanting to leave?’

‘There is little that occurs on these islands that I don't know about.’

‘Out of curiosity, why is it that you don’t let them leave?’

‘I don’t enjoy repeating mistakes.’

Clark sat up at this, raising a brow. ‘Meaning?’

‘Around two hundred years ago, a small group of mernans were adamant about leaving, they promised they would go to the mainland, retrieve essential supplies and return. They promised to not tell another soul about the islands. I was naïve back then, so I let them go. Months passed with no sign of them returning, I though perhaps they had died, until eventually, one day, along the horizon I saw it; a fleet of ships, filled with humans eager to plunder the so-called ‘paradise islands’ for all they had. It was months of chaos, as each ship sank, it was as though there were two more to take their place. For several years, I dealt with this increased traffic, until eventually it quieted down. Since then, I trust no mernan to keep the islands a secret. No matter what they say. Even now, after all these years, I hear that whispers of Paraiso are still circulating on the main lands. All from that one visit centuries ago.’

‘Isn’t that a good thing, though?’

Madre turned those large eyes towards him, and when she did, Clark could see a flicker of something primal within them. Something that reminded Clark very starkly of the last brood mother he had come into contact with. He swallowed thickly and just as quickly as the flicker appeared, it vanished. The silence however, persisted with Gran Madre showing no signs of breaking it.

Clark fidgeted where he sat. ‘What I meant was that when I spoke to Hugo, he mentioned that he came to Paraiso after hearing ‘whispers’ about it. He came here believing he and Esme could raise their daughters in peace, and they have. I'm sure there are many other mernans on the islands who have done the same as them. Obviously, what happened back then was bad, but it means that people now know they can come here to live in peace.’

‘And that's just it, they come here for that peace. And that peace comes from isolation. From the mainland being oblivious to our very existence.’ As she spoke, her voice was carefully even. ‘I’m no longer naïve to the outside world. I have seen how humans have advanced over the years; seen how their ships can now travel underwater, how they can speak to one another across oceans. If knowledge of Paraiso was to get out now, I know that whatever could come from that would be far worse than what happened last time. As you said, there are those who see these islands as a haven, I will not have those who don’t ruin it by leaving. For the good of the pod, one must make sacrifices.’

Clark remained silent, not wanting to anger Madre more than he feared he already had. He simply nodded, seeing sense in the woman's words. Clark slowly rose up in the water until he pressed his feet down into the sand. ‘I better get back to land, it’s getting late.’

That seemed to pull Madre from her reverie as she turned her head towards him. ‘You will visit, won’t you?’

‘Of course, and I'll bring Bruce next time.’ Clark made a face. ‘That is, if he's still speaking to me after leaving him underwater.’

Madre smiled at that. ‘I would like that.’

‘Thanks for speaking with me about all this. It’s helped a lot.’

‘Thank you for listening, Clark. Take care.’

Clark kicked off from the ground and swam out over the abyss. Once he was far enough away, he shot up and out of the water, making his way across the slowly darkening sky towards Cottonwood.

Chapter End Notes

Hello, it's me, I am still alive.

Sorry about the hiatus, my motivation for writing took a major hit and I just wasn't feeling any inspiration for this story. Then I got some lovely comments and it got me out of my funk and I finished the chapter. Is it my best work? No. Will it do? Probably.

As always let me know your thoughts. You guys are what keep me writing. Catch you all next time x

Chapter 52

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Clark landed in Cottonwood, he hoped, despite what he knew, that things would go smoothly. After all, Bruce had a habit of surprising him, and perhaps, this would be another instance of that.

He was kidding himself, but still. It was better than imaging the alternative.

His eyes darted between the two homes before him. He hadn't had a real opportunity to take in Slade's home now that it was finished. By a quick glance he could see it was a near mirror of Selina's. The main difference being that his home wasn't as large. They did however both bare the same stark white walls and vast windows that stuck out from the otherwise homely state of the other houses on the island.

He briefly debated which home to enter, but upon noticing the number of people in Selina's home compared to the sole occupant in Slade's, it was as though the decision was made for him.

He stepped inside Slade's home and realized the biggest difference between his home and Selina's was its interior. Whereas Selina's entrance hall was indicative of the rest of the home with its grand staircases and chandelier; this homes entranceway was simple, like it was leading him to a car showroom rather than a home.

Slade was in the kitchen. The plain nature of the home wasn't helped by the utter lack of decoration. Even now that construction was finished, it was still painfully bare with only the units filling it and not a single item that Clark could even begin to describe as 'homely'. Then again, knowing Slade's penchant for minimalist design, he wouldn't be surprised to find the room looking nearly identical in a couple of months' time.

It took a moment for Slade to look up at him, his attention still on the newspaper in his hands, but when he did, he quirked his head to the side. 'Well I'll be damned.' He synced. 'It worked.'

Clark's brows furrowed together. "You didn't think it would?"

"No, no. I trust Bruce, I just thought you'd have fucked it up somehow."

"Your faith in me is truly inspiring." Clark grumbled as he went to the counter to pour himself a cup of coffee. Trust Slade to not have a microwave or even food in the cupboards, but a coffee maker and enough mugs for a large gathering. Man had his priorities, it seemed.

Clark paused once the coffee was poured, staring at the surface of it. "So, do you know if Bruce is back yet? I didn't sense him at Selina's but…"

When he turned back around, it took everything for him to pull his stare away from the coffee in his hand to Slade. When he did, he was greeted with a remarkably blank expression. Truly, there was no hint of anything there, and if that didn't just make Clark's whole stomach wriggle. "He's not with you?" He asked evenly.

Clark cleared his throat. "Uh, no, I sort of… flew off after the whole thing."

"You… '*Flew off*?'"

"Yeah, I know it sounds bad, but I panicked and before I knew it--"

"No, no." Slade shook his head, holding his hand up. Even without the gesture, Slade's expression was doing more than enough to keep him silent. It still hadn't shifted from its eerie neutrality. "You left Bruce, alone, at the bottom of the ocean? Is that what you're telling me?"

Clark pressed his lips together, offering a meek nod.

"Bruce, the man who just birthed your children-- alone? At the bottom of the ocean? That's where he is?"

Another nod, this one accompanied with a growing grimace.

Slade took a long breath, before letting it out in a slow stream. Finally his expression cracked as he stared at Clark with rising incredulity. "Wow. I know you have your moments of truly awful decision

making, but I think this takes the cake."

"You think he'll be mad?" Clark muttered, as he tried to take a sip of coffee only to find it tasted like ash in his mouth.

"Oh, he will be furious." Slade said without any hesitation.

"I panicked."

"Yeah, no shit, it's apparent you make bad decisions when you panic."

"You don't know what it was like, I saw…" Clark set his cup down, with a shake of the head. "The point is, I know I fucked up, but I like to think Bruce will understand and *maybe* not be that mad."

Slade quirked his head to the side. "Right because Bruce is known for being reasonable and calm."

"God damnit." Clark muttered, pressing his hands into his eye sockets. "Maybe I should just hide till he cools off."

"You *really* need to work on having 'run away' be your only solution to things."

"I'm working on it!" Clark yelled, throwing his hands down.

There was a click and creak of the door followed by the sound of heels on marble. When the pair turned their attention to the sound, after a moment, Selina appeared. She looked haggard, but when she clocked Clark, her expression immediately morphed to barely concealed anger. She pressed her lips into a fine line and folded her arms as she leant against the doorframe.

"Well, if it isn't the man of the hour himself." She said, her eyes narrowing at Clark. "So, Bruce just got home."

Clark had a feeling if Slade wasn't there watching the exchange with barely contained glee, she would have said more, as it stood, she remained quiet, her eyes never leaving Clark's.

"Oh, yeah?" He offered lamely.

At the words, she tilted her head to the side and widened her eyes in mock excitement. "*Oh yeah*." She repeated. "He's in a *great* mood, by the way."

"Ah." Clark said, clasping his hands together. "I better go talk to him."

"That's a great idea! Maybe then he'll yell at *you* instead of me."

"That bad?" Slade said, sipping his coffee.

"Don't start." Selina said, her glare flicking to Slade before she stalked her way across the room. "I can't be in my home right now. I'm going to have a bath here, and you--" she pointed at Slade. "Will *not* bother me."

"What if I'm dying?" Slade called out after her.

"Then die quietly."

Slade nodded to himself as the sound of her footsteps grew quiet. He turned to Clark and nodded. "Well, have fun." He said, raising his cup in commiseration towards him.

"Gee, thanks." Clark muttered as he pushed off the counter and made his way outside. His eyes went to the darkening horizon, and for a brief, almost imperceptible moment, he contemplated flying away and praying that time would fix this.

He grimaced as the thought settled. He really was going to need to work on that.

Ignoring himself, he walked over to Selina’s home. Going through the foyer, he made his way to the kitchen and it was as he stepped inside that he realized that all the home's occupants aside from Selina and by the looks of it Tim, were here.

The fins were gathered in a cluster on the floor whilst those with legs were occupying the stools around the central island. All of them turned to him upon entering and only Jason's expression varied from the universal look of concern the others shared.

No, Jason was *grinning* . “There he is. The man of the hour.”

“Hey everyone.” Clark said, shoving his hands into his pockets. “How's it going?”

“Great, amazing, even.” Jason said, crossing his arms. His grin didn’t lessen in the slightest. “You know dad is ready to kill you, right?”

“Yeah, I heard he wasn’t too happy with me.” Clark muttered.

Judging by the looks the group shared, Clark had apparently voiced the understatement of the century.

“I wouldn’t worry too much, Clark.” Dick offered meekly. “I'm sure you'll work your magic somehow.”

“Yeah!” Steph chimed in. ‘Oh, he is fucked.’

“You got this.” Duke offered with a thumbs up. ‘Mega fucked.’

'Fucked.' Cass concurred.

‘Dad’s gonna rip him a new one.’ Jason synced.

‘Guys. He can hear us now.’ Dick chided.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, gang.” Clark deadpanned. “I better go see Bruce.”

Clark passed them and continued on through the house. He soon entered the large pool room; it was much the same as when he was last here. There was however no lounging mers or quiet conversation to break the near silence. Aside from the quiet push and pull of the artificial tide and humming filters, there was only one other sound of note; a heartbeat.

He walked further into the room and despite every fibre in his being telling him not to, he called out. “Bruce?”

It took a moment, but the heartbeat rocketed in pace, and in a flurry of movement, Bruce burst from the water, his eyes wide. ‘*You*.’

“Hey, hon.” Clark let out, stepping forward once. “You’re looking well.”

‘You piece of shit.’ Bruce growled, pulling himself out of the water and crawling across the ground with such speed that Clark couldn't help but stumble back, slipping on the tile and hitting the floor with a thud as a result. He didn’t even have time to process the shock before Bruce was on top of him, his claws digging into his shirt as he tore at it. ‘You fucker, you mother fucker, I hate you, you left me! You left me again-- you fuck! What the fuck, Clark?’

An awful bout of deja vu hit him as his shirt disappeared into shreds and Bruce's claws kept colliding against his skin despite the lack of damage it was doing to him and the awful amount it was doing to the mer. Clark reached for those hands, holding them still as best he could. That apparently was a bad idea as Bruce chose to instead lean forward, his jaw opening wide as he went for Clark’s neck.

He pulled away before the mer managed to make contact, swinging his body weight to the side to topple Bruce off of him. Broken claws were one thing, but a broken jaw was another entirely. Once the mer was off, Clark shuffled backwards on his rear. “Bruce, please, I'm sorry, can we please talk about this?”

Bruce didn’t pause as he righted himself and bared his teeth with a low growl. ‘We had plenty of time to talk about this if you had stayed in the fucking water, you fuck.’ He started towards Clark again. ‘You left me. Again.’

“I wasn't thinking! I was scared, Bruce. I'm so sorry I did it, but I did, and we need to talk about this rather than do whatever this is!”

‘Well too bad, I don't want to talk-- ’ Bruce lunged for him then, his arms outstretched. Clark grabbed him by the shoulders and held him back, but this position meant he was now not able to avoid the claws that were now being aimed at his face. Despite invulnerability, a claw in the eye still stung and he twitched back with a yelp when one landed right on his cornea.

“*Fuck*!”

That was apparently the worst thing he could have done as Bruce continually went for his eyes, a throaty growl leaving him as he did. ‘Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.’

“Bruce please, this is crazy, think for a second. Can you *please* just think?”

‘I did think. I thought for 12 fucking hours as I came to the surface wondering where the fuck you were. I thought you’d be here but no, Selina told me you were off ocean knows where, so fuck you-- ’ With his eyes screwed shut to avoid the claws, Clark hadn’t realised the ground Bruce had gained with his swipes and this time, when he tried to bite him, he managed to get his neck.

He heard rather than felt the teeth break.

That was enough for Clark to shout, “Right, if this is how you're gonna be--” he threw Bruce across the room, wincing when he heard Bruce slam against the floor. Momentum and the wet tiles had him skidding across the tile until he came to stop by the shore. Clark opened his mouth to call out as Bruce remained still, but before he could, the mer rolled onto his front and hissed. All at once, Clark’s concern left him and he ground out. “Stop being a little shit!”

Bruce rolled his shoulder, and Clark didn’t miss the sound of popping joints. ‘Oh, fuck you. You don't get to tell me how to act, you fuck.’

“Okay, well you don't get to do that to me either! I know I fucked up, and I am sorry Bruce, I didn't think, okay? I was scared, and the shit I saw, what I felt, I didn't know what to do, so I ran, okay? I know I need to stop doing that when I'm scared, and I'm working on that, but the point is that I can't go back in time and undo what I did, I can only say I'm sorry.”

For a moment, the only sound leaving Bruce was that of his heavy breathing, then, he spat; chunks of teeth and blood hit the floor, staining the tile red. ‘I want to kill you.’ He growled.

“Well, too bad, you managed to fall in love with the one person on this planet you can't maul to death.”

Bruce scowled. ‘Fuck you.’

“Hey, I'm just as fucked, I fell in love with the one mer on this planet who mauls people instead of talking.” As he said the words Clark let out a sigh, his expression softening. “Fuck Bruce, this is the first time we are talking, *really* talking, and you’re just telling me to fuck off.”

That seemed to have some effect on the mer as his scowl lessened; he still looked ready to pounce but Clark was willing to take whatever victory he could here. ‘Whose fault is that? I was ready to talk the whole way up to the surface but you ran away.’

“I know, and again, I am sorry. I will never stop being sorry for what I did.” Clark chanced a step forward and even though Bruce bared his now uneven teeth at the movement, he didn’t otherwise move, allowing Clark to make another even smaller step forward. “I don't know what else I can say to you other than I will never do that to you again, if something happens, I'm not just going to run away without a word. Please, I just wanna talk. I want--” His breath caught in his throat. “I wanna hear your voice.”

Given the mer’s anger, Clark hadn’t really had a moment to really listen to Bruce’s voice, but now that he was able to take a moment to simply *think*, he realized it was so unlike what he was used to with the others. It wasn’t as though he were hearing anything, it was more like Bruce was a presence in his head, one that he found oddly comforting.

The severity in Bruce’s glare lessened even further and his stance loosened. He looked away and if Clark didn’t know any better, he could have sworn Bruce’s cheeks were tinted pink.

He stepped forward, continuing. “You sound… I don’t even know how to describe it, it's like I can feel your voice in my head but it’s… *warm*. Is syncing meant to feel like that? ‘Cause it doesn’t with the others.”

Bruce’s lip twitched and Clark could feel the wheels turning in his head. ‘I don’t know…’ He answered, his voice soft. Then he pulled back, sitting on his rear as he peered at Clark. ‘I take it, I sound okay, then.’

“Okay?” Clark repeated, smiling. “You sound amazing. Then again, you could sound like Gilbert Godfrey and it would still be leagues ahead of your throat voice.”

Bruce offered a small frown. ‘I… don't know who that is.’

“Doesn’t matter, point you sound…” Once Clark reached Bruce he crouched down, and brought his hand up to touch Bruce's jaw. “Beautiful.”

Bruce’s lip curled to the side as he turned away from Clark’s hand. He didn’t pull back however so Clark simply shifted his fingers to graze along Bruce's neck, towards his gills that fluttered at the contact. ‘I'm still mad at you...’ The mer muttered.

“I know.” Clark said softly. “You have every right to be, but I'm just… I'm just so happy I can hear you now.”

Bruce offered a hum at that, and Clark wasn’t sure if he meant to do it, but he leaned into Clark’s touch. ‘There is a way you can make it up to me.’

“Oh yeah?” Clark smiled. “What did you have in mind?”’

Bruce’s eyes flicked to him not even a moment later, like a viper, Bruce was on him, pushing Clark flat against the tile. He let out a choked breath as the air was practically forced out of him. As he looked up at those eyes Clark felt a shiver run through him, as it wasn’t anger he saw in them.

It was *want*.

“Shit, Bruce…” Clark muttered. “Three seconds ago you wanted to rip out my throat.”

‘I know.’ Bruce muttered as he learnt forward and licked a wet strip across Clark’s jugular as though to prove a point.

Clark shuddered. “...Do you still want to do that, or?”

Bruce’s mouth opened and Clark felt sharp pin pricks across the now damp strip of flesh. The pressure grew as Bruce’s jaws closed shut, not enough to hurt himself, but enough for Clark to really feel it. The mer only offered a hum in response.

As Bruce nipped at Clark’s neck, his hands trailed lower until they rested Clark’s hips, and with far more grace than Clark was expecting from someone with bloodied fingers, Bruce worked at the button keeping Clark’s shorts together and inched them down. They didn’t get far off Clark’s hips given the mer shaped lump that was impeding the movement, but there was now enough clearance that Bruce's hand was able to snake its way inside.

His fingers were cold, but if anything it only caused Clark to hiss in pleasure. He turned and buried his face into Bruce’s neck, his tongue resting on the slits of his gills as he breathed in the scent of salt across his skin. “Fuck, Bruce…”

‘Sync.’ He said softly as his hand wrapped around Clark. ‘I want you to sync.’

“I-” Clark stuttered before shaking his head by a fraction. ‘Like this?’

Bruce hummed once more. Letting his hand trail up Clark’s length. The movement was hampered due to Bruce laying flat against him, but given how good the weight pressing down on top of him felt, Clark couldn’t bring himself to say anything other than a quiet, ‘please…’

Bruce smiled. ‘Does it feel good?’

‘Fuck yes.’ Clark thought back, his mind already reeling from the pressure. ‘You can squeeze harder, you know, if you want to.’

For a brief moment Clark saw a vindictive smile touch Bruce's face before it was quickly swept away and Bruce's grip did indeed tighten, he then pumped Clark hard and fast before falling into a steady rhythm as he bit his lip, peering down at Clark through half lidded eyes. ‘Come on, Clark. Let me hear you…’

Clark groaned. ‘Shit Bruce, I can barely think right now…’ Words were beyond him, with his entire mind focused solely on how good Bruce's hand felt on him. There was friction with each pump that was right on the cusp of being too much. Yet despite or perhaps because of that, Clark’s head fell back as his breathing grew rapid. It was simultaneously too much and not enough.

‘I want to fuck you.’ Clark ground out, his eyes flicking open to look at Bruce. ‘Please?’

‘I do like the sound of you begging.’ Bruce smiled. ‘But I'm still mad.’

‘Sorry.’ Clark said, almost as a reflex. ‘I--’

Bruce’s pace quickened and Clark couldn't even manage the rest of the words. He bit his lip, keeping whatever stream of consciousness that was about to fall out contained. He writhed, bucking his hips to meet Bruce and felt the mer purr as he bit at Clark’s ear. Clark reared back, feeling his orgasm rise within his core, he let out a gasp.

Just as Bruce let go.

The sound he made was practically inhuman. In the blink of an eye he went from having Bruce's hand tight around his cock to nothing. Just cold air and even colder tiles. He shot up, and sent a wild look towards Bruce, his confusion evident. ‘Bruce?’

Bruce was no longer on him and was lounging on his side, watching Clark with clear disinterest. ‘What?’

‘Uh…’ Clark let out, managing to get his breathing under control as his cock tried to understand why it was so cruelly abandoned. ‘Why did you stop?’

Bruce raised an eyebrow. ‘I told you.’ When the only thing Clark responded with was a growing frown of confusion, Bruce continued. ‘I’m still mad.’

Clark’s mouth fell open.

In the silence, Bruce continued. ‘And *this* is your punishment.’

‘You… you can't be serious.’

‘Oh no, I am.’ Bruce as he swished his tail. ‘You want me to forgive you, you’ll not do anything to yourself until I say you can. Understand?’

The roiling heat that grew in Clark’s stomach at those words was something that he was going to have to address later, but in that moment, he simply balked. ‘But…’

‘No.’ Bruce growled. ‘You fucked up, you need to be punished.’ Bruce brought his hand up and without another word, grabbed Clark’s cock hard. ‘This is your punishment.’

Clark's head lolled back. It took everything to not buck up into that grip. ‘Fuck Bruce, I cant--

‘No.’ Bruce snapped, letting go in an instant.

The sudden lack of pressure was even worse the second time around and Clark grunted. ‘Bruce, please… this isn’t fair.’

But the mer was apparently no longer interested in him as he lay down along his side and languidly stretched. ‘It wasn’t *fair* when you left me alone. Now, I believe you were complimenting my voice, you can continue doing that any time now.’ He said with such sweetness it caused Clark to let out a huff of indignation.

‘Seriously?’

‘Yes.’ Bruce smiled. ‘So, unless you want me to be mad at you for the rest of your life, I suggest you do what I say.’

Clark’s mouth bobbed open as he tried in vain to make sense of what was even happening. He thought he knew Bruce well, but apparently he was completely unaware of how spiteful the mer could be and not being prepared for that was the reason he could barely see through the anger and arousal that was coursing through his system.

Clark clenched his jaw. ‘You sound like shit. Your voice is like gravel in a blender.’

Bruce’s smile however, only grew.

‘Seriously, fuck you.’ Clark spat, standing up and trying to shove his pants back up and swearing as he was met with resistance in the form of a very confused cock. ‘You're an asshole. Pure and simple.’

Bruce just hummed, closing his eyes as he stretched his arms.

Clark stormed from the room and as he left through the kitchen, he ignored the bewildered looks from the kids. He debated flying to Solitude but with construction still going on he realized with a grimaced that he didn’t actually have anywhere else to go.

Which left him with only one choice with Selina’s home off the table.

He found Slade in the exact same place he had left him, the only difference being the page Slade was now reading. He raised his eye to meet Clark and bobbed his head. “How did it go?”

“I hate him.” Clark ground out before catching himself. “Okay, I don't *hate* him, he’s just such a fucking asshole sometimes.”

“I hate to keep reminding you but you did leave him at the--”

“Yeah, I know! I know I did, okay? but still, what he did was--” Clark ground his teeth together. “It doesn't matter, I just…” he let out a long sigh. “I just need a minute away from him.”

Slade watched him and Clark was not ready for how his eye flicked to his crotch.

Nor for the words that left his mouth. “Got you hard then left you aching, I take it?”

Clark's chest burned, and slowly that heat creeped up onto his face. “What?”

Slade however, only shrugged. “He does that. Me and Selina fell for it all the time back in the day.”

Clark wasn't sure how much more his mind could take in one day. Between this and what happened with Bruce he was certain he was certain something was going to break. What, he didn’t now, but whatever it was it was currently creaking from the strain. “I'm just going to repeat myself… *What* ?”

Slade rolled his eye, “I know it's weird. But he can't just forgive and forget, he needs revenge. He needs to feel like things are even and this is how he does it. So just tough it out and it will all blow over in a few days, you’ll see.”

Clark’s frown grew but as it did Slade's words sunk in and with them their implication. “Did you know he was going to do that when I went to go talk to him?”

It was Slade's turn to offer up a saccharin sweet smile. “Yeah.”

“Why didn't you say anything?”

“I told you, this is what he does. If I told you I'd have just been delaying the inevitable.”

Clark let out a huff as he heard quiet padding come towards them. He turned and saw Selina wrapped in a fluffy dressing gown, replete with an even fluffier towel around her head. She seemed so much more relaxed than when Clark had last seen her, even offering up a soft smile as she clocked Clark and went towards the fridge. She opened it and pulled out a bottle of water.

“Selina.” Clark began.

The woman turned to him with a hum of acknowledgement as she opened the bottle.

“Did you know Bruce was going to blue ball me?”

Selina didn’t even pause as she took a sip and hummed again.

“Fuck both of you.” Clark said as he brought his hands up to press into his eyes. “I hate all of you.”

“Aw, hon.” Selina said as she approached and patted his back. “It's a right of passage. You fuck Bruce, you have to deal with just how fucking psychotic he can be.”

“Speaking of, that blood on you, I take it, it's from him?”

Clark stilled and looked down at his chest, spying the streaks of blood. He balked. “Yeah, but I didn't--”

“Oh I know *you* didn’t.” Slade huffed. “Did he fuck himself up enough to need to see Leslie or did he just break a few nails on your abs of steel?”

Clark curled his lip to the side. “He may have broken a few teeth, too.”

Slade rolled his eyes. “Of course he did. Ah well, they'll grow back. Still, I better call Leslie and let her know that giving birth hasn’t lessened Bruce's temper at all.”

“I didn't think it was this bad.” Clark said more to himself.

“He usually takes it all out when he goes hunting.” Selina said. “But I guess ‘cause you can take the beating, he just cut out the middleman and let you have it.”

Clark frowned. “Just because he can’t hurt me doesn’t mean I’m okay with Bruce attacking me whenever I happen to piss him off.”

Slade huffed. “Too bad, Supes. You put your dick in crazy, you now have to deal with said crazy.”

Clark let out a strained sigh. “Yeah, yeah…” he eyed the pair with a shake of the head. “Worst thing about all this shit is that I didn't even get to tell him what happened *after* I left him.”

“Oh, I just thought you went and moped on a beach somewhere.” Slade said, stretching his arm out to pull Selina close to his side as she came up next to him, sipping from her water. “Was I wrong?”

Clark rolled his eyes. He turned and leant his hips against the edge of the counter top. “No, I didn't go *mope*. I went to Paraiso.”

“You--” Slade frowned, his jovial tone suddenly gone. “You did?”

Clark however, didn’t seem to notice. “Yeah, not intentionally or anything. I just sort of woke up there on one of the islands; met a few mers, saw Jaime again, which was nice.”

He wasn’t expecting much when he turned to the pair but seeing just how wide their eyes were was truly something. He raised a brow. “You guys okay there?”

Slade was the first to school his expression as he cleared his throat. “I keep forgetting you’re Superman. Never actually spoken to someone with two legs who has *been* to Paraiso.”

“Yeah, I know. Mernans can't leave there.” Clark nodded. “When I woke up there, I wanted to learn more about the place so the family who found me, took me to speak with Gran Madre.”

Selina’s eyes grew wider if that were possible as Slade’s only narrowed in suspicion. “You actually *spoke* to her?”

“Yeah, talked about how she got there, asked her about abyssal fins in general. It was fascinating. I also said I'd bring Bruce to see her one day. I think it would be nice for him to see he's not all alone, you know?”

Silence swallowed the room and Clark found himself trying to discern why. Slade however just shook his head at his words before sighing. “You know, if you told Bruce this *before* he fucked with you, he probably would have forgiven you then and there. No blue balling required.”

Clark raised a brow. “What? Why?”

“He's wanted to know about Paraiso for years. He doesn't even know where it is.”

“What? but he's a mer.”

Slade made a face. “Okay, imagine you have been dumped into the ocean.” He said, holding his hands up as though framing a picture. “Got it? Okay, now, find me Ecuador.”

Clark frowned.

“It's somewhere out there, just keep swimming till you find it.” At Clark’s unimpressed expression, Slade tilted his head. “What? Too easy?”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Look, I get it, can you stop being an ass? I think I've had my quota for the week.”

“Point is, Bruce wants to know about it. He spoke to Jaime about it when he was here and I'm sure if he hadn't have been pregnant, he'd have gone with Jaime to see it when he left. So given what you've just told us, I'm sure he will be very interested in what you have to say about your visit.”

Clark contemplated his words and as though answering for him, his cock offered a dull ache. “I'm still pissed at him.” He muttered.

Slade rolled his eye at that. “Look I get it, you’re horny and in pain, but Bruce will fix *both* of those things if you just go back in there and talk to him about this.”

“You think?” Clark asked.

“Oh yeah.” Selina said with a bob of the head.

As he took in both of their faces, Clark’s eyes narrowed. “Wait. Are you just saying that so I go back in there and get blue balled again?”

“No.” Both said far too quickly.

Clark huffed as he pushed himself off on the counter and walked out. “Fuck you both.”

Yet, despite his own words, he still marched his way back towards Selina’s.

Chapter End Notes

Merry early Christmas folks. Sorry for the wait between updates, I just struggle with motivation sometimes so it takes me a while to get back into the swing of things.

As always, let me know your thoughts, and I'll catch you all next time! <3

Chapter 53

Chapter by Katflap (Batman_in_Lingerie)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He found Bruce right where he had left him.

A part of him expected to find him sulking at the bottom of the pool, but no, he was still sitting on the tiles, staring down at his hands as though the act of doing so might repair the broken nails and skin.

It did make Clark feel slightly better that he looked to be in just as much pain as Clark was in, though the mer quickly made sure to hide that fact the moment Clark made his presence known by poking his head into the room. A glare was sent his way, but aside from that, Bruce didn't make any effort to talk.

Great.

Clark stepped inside, making his way slowly across the tiles. When he came up to Bruce he offered a bob of the head. "I need to talk to you."

Bruce frowned. 'Well, I don't want to talk to you right now.'

"It's about Paraíso."

Bruce's ears pricked up almost instantly, his pupils flaring. He cocked his head and regarded Clark, all evidence of annoyance swiped from his body. If Clark had known that word was all it would take to make Bruce forgive and forget he'd have screamed it at the top of his lungs the moment he landed here.

'What about it?' Bruce asked, trying his best to seem blasé and failing miserably.

"I went there, after I left you. I didn't realise I was *there* at first. I thought I just washed up on a random beach, but then I met some mernans." Bruce's eyes remained wide as he spoke, and Clark made sure to watch him intently as he said the next part. "I also met Gran Madre."

Clark didn't need to pay too much attention to notice the change in Bruce. The most obvious and immediate thing of note being that he stopped breathing, his gills and mouth fluttering as if both of them forgot their primary function. He looked confused-- no, nervous. Clark watched him for a moment before he crouched down to his eye level. As he leant forward and reached out to grab Bruce's hand, that seemed to pull the mer out of whatever reverie he was in and he took a shaky breath. 'What did she look like?'

"Uh." Clark let out, surprised by the question. Slade had mentioned Bruce's curiosity over the island, but he didn't think that would extend to what the abyssal fin that swam around the place looked like. He soon realised he didn't actually have an answer for Bruce that wasn't going to result in more scratching and biting.

'Never mind, I can just--' Bruce came forward in a burst of movement, his forehead pressing against Clark's. There was a wash of pain, though that quickly vanished leaving only a warm sensation that only grew hotter the longer Bruce remained in contact, just as it was verging on painful, Bruce pulled back. 'Maybe… maybe she…' Bruce shook his head. 'I want you to take me to her.'

Clark frowned. "What, right now?"

'Yes.'

"Do you forget your missing half of your teeth and nearly all of your claws?"

Bruce rolled his eyes. 'And whose fault is that?'

"Really?" Clark deadpanned. "You're going to blame *me* for what *you* did to yourself?"

'Yes, and now I want you to take me to Paraíso.'

"Look Bruce, it's more complicated than that; they have a lot of unhappy mernans there and I don't think me rocking up with you is going to make things any better."

Bruce pulled back, a grimace tight on his face. ‘Why would you think I want to see *them* ? I want to speak with Gran Madre.’

“Still, you want to go right now? What about the babies?” He cast his stare down to where the small clutch laid. They hadn’t moved from where Bruce had placed them.

‘Tim and the others can watch them. Now, come on.’ Bruce brought his arms up, making grabbing motions with his hands until Clark got the hint. He scooped him up and after a moment raised a brow at the mer.

“Just so we're clear, I do this for you, we’re even for the whole leaving you at the bottom of the ocean thing?”

‘Yes.’ Bruce said with a nod.

“Well, okay then. I’ll let the others know we’re headin’ out.”

After informing the rest of the pod of the imminent departure, the pair were off. Clark flew quick, though not fast enough to cause any damage to Bruce, the last thing he needed to add to Bruce's injury list was wind burn.

Considering he didn’t actually remember much about how he got here the first time around, he felt as though he made pretty good time all things considered. Sure, he had to play off some backtracking as an attempt to avoid air traffic, but aside from that, they soon found themselves at the picturesque islands of Paraíso.

Taking in the view, Clark noted the collection of islands, each one distinct from each other. Some were little more than rocky lumps with a handful of trees dotting the surface, while others held tidy farms and simple homes, not unlike Hugo and Esme’s. At the heart of it all lay a vast, glassy pool of crisp blue water. It must have been the Oasis Hugo had mentioned, and upon looking at it, Clark understood why it was called Paraíso. Mers of every colour darted through the shallow waves, and along the shores, mernans watched them.

Not knowing what island to land on, or even *if* he should land on one, Clark went straight into the water, not worried about himself nor Bruce when it came to the large matriarch of the archipelago attacking them.

Clark eased himself slowly into the water and once fully in, let Bruce go. The mer quickly swam down and around him a quick circuit before coming up next to Clark. ‘Right, so where is she?’

‘She’s around there somewhere.’ Clark synced, focusing his hearing and finding the near glacial beating of a heart deep below where they paddled. ‘She’s down deep’

Bruce didn’t even reply, diving down into the water without a word. Clark found himself staring into the empty space he was once occupying his brows furrowing together. He wasn’t exactly expecting a parade but the lack of even a basic thank you had him rolling his eyes as he went to follow.

He dove down and followed Bruce. The pace he was moving at meant Clark was in a near constant state of movement in order to keep up. He was curious as to why Bruce was so intent on meeting Madre so soon after hearing about Clark’s visit, but he realised he couldn’t say much. The moment he heard about Kara's presence on Earth, he was there, practically in awe at seeing another Kryptonian in the flesh. If Clark had to guess, it must have been before the quake that Bruce last saw another abyssal fin.

He briefly lost track of Bruce as his heart beat slowed to a crawl, he wasn’t so deep as to transform, but from what Clark could remember, he was right there along that edge.

He saw movement up ahead and swam towards it. It was Bruce and before him, the great looming shadow of Madre.

Clark came to a stop not too far away.

So quiet he could barely hear it, he heard her voice.

‘When I said come visit, I hadn't thought you’d come so soon.’ If he didn’t know better he could almost hear the titter of laughter in her voice.

Bruce turned back to face him, apparently confused as to why Clark was down here with them both.

Avoiding the urge to roll his eyes again, Clark swam up beside him. ‘I didn't really have much of a choice. Someone was eager to meet you.’

‘I can see that.’ Madre said, her eyes sweeping over Bruce. ‘Well, little fin, what did you wish to know?’

‘Your pod, where is it? What trench?’ Bruce practically growled.

Madre tilted her head. ‘I'm podless, gup, that is why I am here.’

Bruce shook his head, swimming right up to her face. ‘Before you were forced to leave. Where was your pod?’

If it were possible, Madre smiled. ‘Why do you wish to know? Do you want to assert dominance over them now that you’ve turned? I assure you, gup, even if I told you where they were you wouldn’t find anyone. They are all gone.’

Bruce bared what remained of his teeth. ‘What. Pod.’

Clark watched with growing dread as the two mers regarded one another. Yes, Bruce was the size of a gnat when compared to Gran Madre, but he also knew how vicious he could be when he was mad.

With one pulse of her tail, Madre came right up the pair, her eyes mer meters from them. ‘Gotham, that was where my pod called home. They once resided in what is now known as the darkscar faultline, but, from what I hear, you already know that.’

Bruce stilled. ‘You're…. You’re from Gotham?’

‘I am and from what I hear…’ Her eyes flicked to Clark. ‘You are, too.’

Bruce looked up in quiet awe. ‘Does that mean… you birthed Martha?’

Madre nodded. ‘I did.’

‘So… you… you’re…’ Bruce looked up at her his, eyes wide. ‘My grandmother?’

‘I am.’ She hummed.

Clark watched with bated breath. At those two words, Bruce went utterly still. In that moment, he looked smaller than Clark had ever seen him, fragile in a way that seemed wholly alien

Madre moved so slowly it was as if the world had paused; her hands rose and she gently cupped Bruce in her palms. She brought him to her face, and he surged forward, pressing himself into her scaled forehead as though trying to melt into her. He wailed, a sound so raw it pierced even the muffled silence of the water. Clark heard it anyway. Could feel the pain in it, the years of ache pulsing within that broken sound.

He realised he shouldn’t be here, and as quietly as he could manage he swam up and towards the surface.

The moment his head broke the surface, Clark realised just how far out they’d swam. The islands were just a blur across the horizon, and with steady strokes, he swam towards where he thought Nero would be, ducking down under the water as he got closer to the archipelago. The last thing he needed were the other locals spotting him.

Once he reached the quiet beach, he crawled onto the sand, and made his way to the small home nestled by the sand and shrubs and peered inside. Esme and Hugo were nowhere to be seen. With nothing else to do, Clark settled in the sand and watched the waves roll in and out.

He heard steps in the sand behind him, and when he turned, he expected to see Hugo's kindly face.

The man staring at him, however, didn’t seem quite as welcoming as Hugo had been. “You, uh, just wash up?” He asked brusquely, crossing his arms. Clark took in his appearance and realised the man wasn’t being standoffish, just awkward, as if he didn’t quite know how to react to Clark calmly sitting on the sand before him and really, who could blame him?

"Uh." Clark said, remembering how Hugo and Esme had reacted when the idea of the other islanders discovering his presence came up.

The man readjusted his glasses as he watched Clark, even before his hand had lowered they had already slipped down his nose again. They looked like they were barely being held together. With tape and glue visable along several portions of the frame. Clark supposed there weren't exactly many optometrists in Paraíso. "You're the one who left aren't you?" the man asked, and Clark balked.

Clark felt his brow begin to sweat. "Uh."

The man held up his hands. "Don't worry, I'm not gonna tell on you. I've been Hugo's neighbour since he washed up here." He turns and points through the trees and greenery, "my home is just through there." He continues.

"So he told you about me?" Clark ventured as the man came and sat down beside him, his hands going to his glasses again. It seemed almost like a reflex given how absently he did it.

"Not exactly, I overheard his girls talking about you." He offered a wry smile, half obscured by his moustache. "Superman can sync, who would have thought?"

"Ah." Clark let out. "Good to see they kept their promise of not telling anyone about me."

"Eh, they're kids. When I was their age, I couldn't keep a secret either. Besides it was just me and Babs out here who heard them, they know better than to talk about someone like you around the *other* mers." The man made a face and muttered, "not that I have a problem with the other species, it's just that I know where I stand with other Blackfins, you understand."

Clark elected to ignore the half ramble at the end and bobbed his head. "Who is Babs?" He asked instead

"Sorry-- my wife, Barbara. Oh, I'm Jim, by the way." He held out his hand, the other quickly adjusting his glasses. "Jim Gordon."

"Nice to meet you, Jim." Clark said, accepting the handshake. "Clark."

“Clark.” Jim repeated with a nod. “Well, how long are you sticking around this time, Clark? I'm sure Babs would love to meet you.”

“Depends on my partner, he’s currently down there talking to Gran Madre.”

“Ah.” Jim said, pursing his lips. “Should we be worried?”

“I’m not.” Clark shrugged. “They had some catching up to do.”

“Oh well, that’s good then.” Jim said, standing up and brushing the sand from his clothes. “Can I offer you a coffee?”

Clark accepted the offer and followed Jim through the trees to his home. It was noticeably smaller than Hugo’s place, but pleasant enough inside; a single bed, a small table and kitchen area. It reminded Clark of his own shack, though he had to admit Jim had a far better sense of décor.

“Please, sit. I’ll make us a pot.”

Clark did as he was told, watching as Jim prepared the coffee, his glasses slipping down his nose more than once as he did. Clark couldn’t help it, as the older man settled into the chair with a sigh, Clark nodded toward the troublesome accessory.

“You know, if you told me your prescription, I could get you a new pair.”

Jim stilled at the suggestion, and after a moment’s thought, shook his head. “That’s very kind of you to offer, but people would wonder where I got them.”

“You could say you found them.”

“Yes.” Jim let out a dry chuckle. “I’m sure everyone would believe I just found a pair of glasses with my exact prescription, in perfect condition, on the beach.”

Clark shrugged. “It was just a suggestion.”

“One that I do appreciate.” Jim said with a hum. “But it’s fine. I’m used to them.”

“How do people cope with things like that?” Clark asked, sipping cautiously from the cup. He made a face. It didn’t taste like any coffee he’d ever had but he wasn't going to say as much to the man.

Jim didn’t so much as blink as he drank from his own. “Most don’t. We’ve had a few people pass from not having access to the medication they needed. Some ships and freighters carry medical supplies, but it’s mostly the basics. Not things like insulin or ACE inhibitors… it’s, uh…” He swallowed thickly. “It’s been hard.”

“Jesus…” Clark muttered. “I didn’t even think of that. Maybe trading with the outside world isn't such a terrible idea.”

"It’s hard for people to ever see both sides of the argument, they usually stick so completely to one side that they can’t fathom how the other half could possibly disagree.” Jim said with another hum. “You’ve got the Paraíso Independence League, trying to get everyone on board with the idea of getting rid of Gran Madre and leaving the islands to trade and what have you and then you’ve got folks like Hugo who want to stay here and keep everything secret. Both sides have their merits. Both come with sacrifices.”

“I spoke to Madre about the last time she let people off the island.” Clark offered. “It didn’t go well.”

Jim looked surprised. “Didn’t even know she ever had. Must’ve been long before my time.”

“Yeah, she said it was around two hundred years ago.”

“God.” Jim huffed, shaking his head. “Definitely before my time, then.”

Clark offered a half-smile. “Just a tad.” He took another sip and, this time, peered at the surface of the liquid with a thoughtful hum.

Jim gave a chuckle. “Sorry, I should’ve warned you the coffee’s not actually coffee. It’s made from Maya nuts. They grow on some of the islands.” Jim gestured out of the window. "Including ours."

Clark hummed appreciatively and took another sip. “It’s nice.”

“Thanks. Truth be told, I’ve forgotten what actual coffee tastes like. Whenever outside goods *do* make it to the islands, they’re meant to go to Great Paraíso for the council to divvy up. But more often than not, it turns into a finders-keepers system. Islanders keep whatever they want and only give the council the stuff they don’t.”

“Coffee being one of them.” Clark surmised.

“Exactly.” Jim said with a nod. “But I’d rather they hoard coffee than medicine. As far as I’m concerned, they’re welcome to it so long as the important stuff still gets through.”

They finished their drinks, and when Clark heard the sound of water splashing outside, he also heard a quiet voice echo in his mind. ‘Jim?’

“In here, Babs!” Jim called out. “Wife’s home. I’ll introduce you.”

Clark didn’t know what he expected. But when Jim opened the door, the mer laying there was *not* what he expected. In fact, there was no way he could’ve prepared for what he saw.

Barbara looked at him and that was just it. It was Barbara . Not Jim Gordon’s wife Barbara, but *Barbara.* Lucy’s niece. The daughter of her brother Jim--

Clark’s eyes widened. “Holy shit.”

Jim cleared his throat as Barbara tilted her head curiously at Clark's sudden gormless expression. “Uh, this is Clark, Babs. The *Superman* the kids were talking about.”

‘I see.’ Barbara nodded, dragging herself across the floor towards him. It was uncanny. Same red hair, same vivid green eyes. She was the spitting image of Barbara. She just had a tail. ‘Nice to meet you, Clark.’

“Uh, yeah. Same.” He replied, quickly getting to his feet. “Jim, can I have a word?”

He exchanged a glance with Barbara and realised, yes-- mers and mernans *did* talk whenever they shared looks. Clark heard as much clear in his head, ‘Do you mind?’ Jim asked. ‘No, go ahead,’ Barbara replied.

Jim nodded towards the door Barbara had just entered from, and they walked a short way to the beach.

“You alright there, son? Looked like you were gonna keel over when you saw the wife. I know she’s drop-dead beautiful, but she *is* taken.”

“You’re from Cottonwood, right?” Clark said, as Jim froze.

This time when his glasses slipped down his nose, he didn’t push them back up. “How-- how did you--”

“I’ve met your daughter. And your sister, Lucy. I go to Cottonwood all the time.”

“You--” But Jim seemed lost for words. His eyes widened until they began to water. “I can’t believe it, you--” Jim bolted back towards the house. ‘Babs! Babs! He knows Barbara-- *our* Barbara!’

The sound that tore through Clark’s mind was high-pitched and sharp, something not unlike what Bruce managed when stressed. It pierced straight through him and before he could recover, there was a blur of scales across the grass and sand, and then a firm hand tugging him to the ground by the waistband of his trousers.

‘You’ve met our daughter?’ Barbara’s eyes were fierce, a low growl escaping her.

Clark nodded quickly. “Yeah. And Jim’s sister, Lucy. I know them both. Hell, I'm pretty sure she's dating my partner’s son. She knows she’s a Blackfin, and she’s fine with it.”

That caused Barbara to falter, and all at once, the fire in those eyes was gone. ‘And... she’s happy?’

“Yeah.” Clark said gently. “Very.”

Barbara sank down onto her rear, and before Clark could say anything else, tears began slipping down her cheeks, but just as he was about to stammer out a few awkward reassurances, she gave him a watery smile. ‘Oh, I’m so glad to hear that…’

Jim approached then, crouching down to pull her into his chest. “I don’t think you understand how much of a weight you’ve just lifted off our shoulders.” He said to Clark, his voice quiet.

Clark didn’t know what to do as the couple held one another. He ended up shoving his hands into his pockets and staring down at the sand. Eventually, the pair composed themselves, and Jim stood, giving Clark a firm pat on the shoulder.

“So, how’s our little Barbara doing?” His smile watery.

Clark nodded. “She’s good. Works at the store with Lucy, is friends with a few of the other kids on the island. She’s also the spitting image of you.” He added, glancing down at Barbara.

Jim laughed warmly. “Well, that’s good. Don’t know what her life would’ve been like if she inherited *this* mug.”

“I just...” Clark crossed his arms. “I just have one question. Why is she still on Cottonwood? Why didn’t you bring her here with you?”

“Ah.” Jim finally adjusted his glasses. “I wanted to. We both did. But neither of us knew much about Paraíso before we left for it. Lucy thought we were mad, said we were insane for wanting to go to an island we weren’t even sure existed. She forbade me from taking Barbara, and after a lot of back and forth, we reached a compromise: I’d go with Babs, and once we’d got settled, I’d come back to collect her.”

“But…” Clark began, already seeing the flaw.

“Yeah… we didn’t know it was a one-way trip.” Jim said quietly.

‘Lucy didn’t believe me when I tried to get Barbara myself. She thought Jim must have been killed and that the same thing would happen to Barbara if I took her,’ Barbara muttered. ‘I tried a few times to reach her, I even found her playing on the beach once when she was just a toddler. I tried to speak to her, but--’

“She didn’t have her sync.” Clark finished softly.

‘No,’ Barbara whispered. ‘And when she tried to come to me, Lucy ran out and scooped her up before I even touched her. My own daughter.’ She shuddered, wiping her face. ‘I'm happy to hear she’s safe and happy, but the fact Lucy kept her from me-- from *us* -- is something I’ll never forgive.’

Clark hummed. “Fuck.” He said.

“Yeah, fuck indeed.” Jim nodded.

“I’m sure Lucy meant well.” Clark offered, a little sheepishly. “She really cares for Barbara. Sees her as her own.”

Jim smiled at that, but Barbara only huffed and looked away. “That’s good, at least. And hey, considering you know Luce, maybe let her know I’m still kicking.”

Barbara jolted at that, whirling around. ' Yes! And then you can bring Barbara here!’

Jim at least shared Clark’s apprehension at that suggestion. “Now Babs, I doubt Barbara would want to up and leave her life on Cottonwood just like that.” He clicked his fingers. “But you could go visit and talk to her now. Clark, her sync’s active, right?”

Clark nodded.

Barbara didn't look convinced. 'I want our daughter *here* with us, Jim.'

"So do I, love, but she's a grown woman now. We can't make her do anything. Clark can talk to her, and you can go visit. Then we'll see where things go."

An uneasy silence settled over them, eventually broken when Barbara turned and shuffled back towards the house. Jim let out a sigh and shook his head. "Sorry about all that." He said once she was inside.

"Don't apologise. I get it." Clark nodded. "I can't imagine what it's been like for you both."

"Knowing Barbara was safe was enough for me." Jim said, gazing out at the water. "Lucy kept her word and raised her well, and that's all I could've asked for. Would I have liked to raise her myself? Sure, but…" He pursed his lips. "I'm not going to pretend living here has been easy."

"She really is a great girl." Clark offered. "She's just like Lucy."

Jim laughed. "God, don't let Babs hear that. She'd swim over there right now and start a war."

Clark gave a wry smile. "Well, I'll talk to Barbara for you. Maybe you could become pen pals?"

"Now there's a thought." Jim said, rubbing his chin. "If she's not comfortable coming here, a letter here and there would be enough for me."

Clark hummed in agreement.

It wasn't long before Bruce crawled up onto the shore and exchanged a look with Jim, who raised his brows at the sudden appearance of the mer. "Hi there."

‘Hello,’ Bruce replied blandly. ‘ Can we go home?’ he asked, turning to Clark.

Clark rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, let me just say goodbye.” He offered his hand to Jim. “Good meeting you, Jim. I’ll talk to Barbara.”

“Thanks.” Jim replied warmly. “You’re welcome back any time.”

With that, Clark scooped Bruce into his arms, and they were off.

“Did you have a good talk, Blue?”

Bruce fought back a smile as he rested his head against Clark’s shoulder. ‘Yes.’

“Good.” Clark hummed.

Chapter End Notes

Omgggg I am so sorry everyone I really did not mean to let-- *checks last chapter date* holy shit, a year to pass since the last update, but I just completely lost motivation and was focusing on my uni work and every time I opened up google docs, I'd just stare at the screen and give up. I want to say the next update won't be in a years time, but who knows

I will say, you guys are what keep me going. Every time I get a nice comment, and encouragement, I get the motivation to keep writing. I have something big planned for this story and when I get to chapters like that i usually cant stop writing so here's to more chapters xox

once again sorry for the delay and catch you all next time :D

*slight edit for this chapter: I previously wrote that Lucy thought Barbara killed Jim, but I have now changed it to reflect what I really meant.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!